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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

October 21, 1896

No. 939.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
92 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXXIII.



"HA! IT IS DASHING CHARLIE. THERE IS DANGER AFOOT FOR HIM TO RIDE SO," CRIED COLONEL BUCKNER.

Dashing Charlie's Man-Hunt;

OR,

THE GENTLEMAN SPORT.

A Tale of the Forts, Outlaw Runs
and Red Trails.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

UPON A FALSE TRAIL.

A PARTY of five mounted men were riding along a trail in New Mexico, one in advance of the other four, and all riding in Indian file.

There was something strange about the horse-men—a look that was mysterious, and which would have at once caught the eye of any one who saw them.

The one in the lead rode some fifty feet ahead of his followers, and his appearance was striking.

All five were dressed in deep black clothing, black sombreros, black top-boots, and were armed most completely for offense or defense.

But the leader wore a mask which completely hid his face from the most penetrating eye.

All were mounted, too, upon jet-black horses, and animals that had every indication of speed and endurance.

The leader was a man of fine physique, rising a trifle over six feet, with massive shoulders, slender waist and small hands and feet.

From boots to sombrero he was in black, mask and all, the somber hue giving him a funereal appearance.

His saddle and bridle were very elegant, studded with silver, while his spurs were of gold. These and his weapons were the only things to break the monotony of his sable outfit.

The sun was near its setting when the leader rode into a clump of timber and called a halt for the night.

"Men, here is the spot marked on the map, and as night is upon us we will not begin the search before morning, so go into camp."

The men seemed glad of a rest. They had evidently ridden a long distance, as their horses were jaded. They soon had the camp equipments ready, the leader meanwhile walking about the timber, intently examining the spot.

A cheery camp-fire was soon casting its rays through the timber, as darkness came on; supper was cooking, and the horses, staked out near, were grazing contentedly.

The chief's supper was served him apart from the others, with a tin plate, knife and fork and a mug of solid silver.

After the meal, he wrapped himself in his blankets and lay down to sleep, while the others followed his example, excepting one of their number, who stood guard, for the party were in a country where danger constantly threatened.

The night passed without an interruption, and with the first peep of day over the hilltops eastward, the chief was upon his feet.

While the men were preparing breakfast he was lying upon his blanket, a map spread out before him.

This map was skillfully yet roughly drawn, and there was an accompanying key to it, which the leader was also studying.

After breakfast the men reported for work, and their leader gave them certain instructions, and they moved away as though following a trail.

Left to himself, the man in a mask began to pace to and fro, and muse half-aloud to himself:

"At last I have fortune in my grasp, and be my past what it may, the fortune shall bring me all the enjoyment there is in life."

"Yes, within the hour I will find that treasure of gold, and then I shall go my way alone through life, for why should I be a fool and divide with those men?"

"Their lives alone stand between me and their shares of the gold, and what care I for human life, I who make it a pastime to kill my fellow-beings."

"No; when the treasure is found, then instead of gold, these men shall have lead."

"Four quickly-fired shots, and they are dead; that is all."

"Then all belongs to me, and I go my way to seek pleasure alone in life."

"Let me see: they should have made the point by this time, and I will start to meet them."

The men had started on four diverging lines, and the leader moved off from a large tree, counting his steps as he did so.

"Three hundred due east," he said, as he stepped off that number, and happened upon the spot where the four men were.

"We told off the number, sir, in the directions you told us to go, and here we are," said one of the men.

"And your steps all tally with the instructions?"

"Yes, sir," responded the men together.

"And three hundred steps bring me to where you are halted; so all is correct."

"Now to read the sealed instructions given me by my prisoner, and which I pledged myself not to open until I had reached the spot where the Texan buried the gold."

His hands, in spite of his nerve, trembled with excitement when he broke open the paper of "Last Instructions," and the four men gathered eagerly about him as he did so.

"We have followed the trail unerringly, men, to the old camp, and our steps told off just now, prove that there is no mistake; so now to see just where that quarter of a million dollars in gold is hidden."

He opened the paper, and, after reading a few lines, his teeth went together with a snap, and from between them was hissed forth a bitter oath, followed by the words:

"Men, we have been deceived by that officer who was my prisoner, for we have been following a false trail, and there is no gold here, the map and instructions all being a blind."

"Oh! but I will have a cruel revenge for this treachery of yours, Lieutenant Frederic Gibbs!"

And the man stood gnashing his teeth with rage, while his men gazed upon his masked face with looks of utter dismay.

CHAPTER II.

THE LIEUTENANT'S STRATEGY.

THE men seemed as much cast down and enraged as did their chief, at the discovery that had been made, for little did they dream what his murderous intention had been toward them, had he found the gold they were searching for.

For some moments the chief seemed unable to speak, after his first burst of temper, and then he became calm and said:

"See here, men, I desire to explain to you this situation as it is."

"I am unknown to you, other than as Muello, the Mexican, chief of our band of Black Bravos of the Trails."

"But I have been scheming for more gold than we could secure through robbing trains, stage-coaches and marauding the mines."

"I hoped to get a fortune at one stroke, and in this way:

"An old miner of Valley Mines, when dying of consumption, sent Dashing Charlie, a scout, to Texas to his brother, who was a ranchero there, asking him to come to him."

"The scout, as you know, was successful on his errand, brought back with him Richard Markham, the ranchero, and his brother, old Matt Markham, the miner, gave the quarter of a million dollars in gold he had dug and hidden away to his niece."

"You know that I followed the Markham gold train on its way to Texas, and attacked it, and discovered that the ranchero had hidden the gold on the way, thus saving it from me."

"Richard Markham, the ranchero, escaped me, though badly wounded, and reached his home, where he died."

"His daughter went to Fort Blank, to her uncle, Commandant Buckner, and was escorted by the colonel's aide, her cousin, and I made him a prisoner, as you are also aware, though she escaped by the timely arrival of Dashing Charlie, who carried her to the fort."

"As my prisoner, threatened with death if he did not reveal the secret I am sure he knows, as to where Markham buried his daughter's gold, Lieutenant Gibbs at last yielded, as he said, and consented to confess just where the treasure was hidden."

"He made certain terms with me, drew this map, wrote these pretended directions, and sent us off on a journey of days to this old camping-ground, pretending that here we would find the treasure intact."

"I have diligently followed the trail, found the camping-ground, stepped off the distances marked here, and opening this paper, marked 'Last Instructions,' supposed we had the gold in our grasp."

"And yet hain't, chief?" asked one of the men, who, with the others, had listened most attentively to all their chief had said.

"You shall hear just what these last instructions are, for I will read them to you," was the answer.

Then the chief read, in a voice that quivered with suppressed rage:

"Having had your men step off the required number of yards, and you made a distance yourself which will bring you all together at a given point, you will find yourself further than ever from the coveted gold which you have sinned so greatly to get possession of."

"The truth is, Muello, the Mexican, I have sent you upon a wild-goose chase."

"You would not believe my assertion, on honor, that I did not know where the gold was buried nor had any clue to it from papers left by Captain Richard Markham, and I also believe his daughter, the heiress, is in ignorance of where her father hid the gold, as he died before telling her."

"As I had no idea of being tortured by you, and your band of cut-throats, when I could gain for myself surcease of misery while your prisoner, I sent you on this fruitless, bootless errand, a ride of hundreds of miles, feeling assured that before your return to put me to death for deceiving you, Dashing Charlie, the scout, would track you to

your lair and lead some of my own gallant Boys in Blue to my rescue."

"Having at last gotten rid of you for a week's time, though still held in bondage in your stronghold, I subscribe myself."

"Your unrelenting foe
"FREDERIC GIBBS
"Lieutenant U. S. Army."

"Now, men, you have heard what this officer has dared to write me, and his words tell how cleverly he has deceived us, how he has sent us away here on this long trail to in the end laugh at us as his victims."

"Men, I ask you what should be the fate of such a man?"

"Death!"

The word was uttered by each man with savage vengeance in look and voice.

"And so say I, for if he does not know where the gold is hidden there is no need of preserving his life in the belief that we can wring the secret from him."

"No, chief, let him die!" said one man earnestly, and he but echoed the sentiments of all.

"Yes, and he shall die a death of cruelest torture," was the low, determined response of the outlaw chief, followed by the words:

"Now we take the trail back to our retreat, and woe be unto that young aide-de-camp."

CHAPTER III.

AN INDIAN ON THE TRAIL.

A BAND of scouts were encamped in a canyon in one of the wildest fastnesses of a range of mountains in New Mexico.

The scene was one that appeared to have long been a camp, for there was felled timber lying about, the remains of many camp-fires, and the grass had been cropped close, while the place was all cut up with hoof-tracks, as though there had been a desperate horseback fight there.

Then too under the shadow of some pines growing on the banks of a brook were a number of graves, all freshly made.

There were two groups of these graves, one of only four or five mounds, the other of a dozen or more, and they were apart as though being foes in life, the occupants were separated in death.

In the canyon some eight or ten horses were grazing, while saddles and pack-saddles, with bridles and lariats, were hanging to a tree near.

Grouped about the camp-fire, cooking their noonday meal, were the scouts, seven in number.

They were a bold-faced, daring-looking lot of men, ready to face any danger in the line of duty.

"Well, pards, after dinner we will take the trail for the fort, as there is no longer any use of waiting here that I can see," said the scout who was acting as "captain" of the squad.

He was a handsome young man, with the look of one who enjoyed the wild life he led, and his face denoted kindness of heart as well as pluck and determination.

"Yas, Kit, they has got ther wind o' our being here from some one o' their spies, and you bet they don't walk into our trap," announced another of the party.

"You bet, Muello, ther Mexican, hain't ther man ter walk into our parlor says ther spiders to ther flies," a third added.

"That hain't Muello's way."

"No, he are keen as a thorn, and he knows how matters has tared out, thet the lieutenant escaped and brought his soldiers to attack the retreat."

"He had four men with him when he went on thet gold hunt, didn't he?"

"Yes, only four," answered Kit Kirby.

"Then that leaves Muello, the Mexican, and his four men all that are left of the outlaw band of Black Bravos, and I guess they won't try it on again."

"I'm thinking the are about wiped out in these parts."

"And they didn't get the young lady's gold arter all."

"Good for her it is, too."

And so the party chatted away until the order came from Kit Kirby to saddle up the horses and prepare for the trail back to Fort Blank, some sixty miles away.

The party were a band of scouts, who had come with the soldiers to attack the outlaws in their retreat, and had been left by Lieutenant Frederic Gibbs, who had been Chief Muello's prisoner, to capture the outlaw leader and his four men, when they returned from this fruitless gold-hunt which he had sent them upon.

They had waited two weeks, giving him far more than time to get back, and at last, convinced that the chief had word of their being there and the wiping out of his band, they decided to return to the fort.

With their traps upon a couple of pack-horses they started on the long trail, Kit Kirby in the lead, and had soon left the retreat of the Black Bravos to solitude and the dead who rested there.

Hardly had they gotten well out of sight when an Indian came rapidly up the trail leading to the retreat.

He was a red-skin of large size, powerfully

built, and wore the dress and ornaments of a Pawnee chief and soldier combined.

He was armed with a rifle, a pair of revolvers, a very long-bladed hunting-knife, and had slung at his back a bow and arrows.

Painted in all the glory of the war-trail, he looked like a dangerous foe to meet.

Up the trail he came at a swinging trot, and upon arriving in view of the late camp of the scouts, came to a sudden halt.

"All gone! Red Soldier come too late.

"It heap bad, for bad chief and men coming now.

"Red Soldier must fight alone, and maybe get killed.

"That heap bad, for he don't feel good since bear-fight; but maybe he get one, two, three, four, five scalps.

"He will try, for Red Soldier heap brave man."

With this self-glorification, which all Indians who are brave indulge in, while the cowards of a tribe remain wisely silent, the Red Soldier hunted about for a point of advantage.

He showed his cunning in selecting a position which he could retreat from if crowded too hard, while he also had an advantage against numbers.

The spot selected was in a pile of rocks which could not be readily scaled, and especially when a pair of revolvers, rifle and bow and arrows were confronting one with deadly intent.

When settled in his fortification, Red Soldier again began to soliloquize, and as follows:

"Me ready, and fight hard; get heap scalps.

"Red Soldier nearly killed by bear, and he now heap dead if Dashing Charlie don't come and kill bear.

"Red Soldier heap drunk that day.

"No drink bad medicine any more.

"Lay up one, two, three weeks, and now take trail.

"Ugh! bad pale-face coming, so get ready now."

As the Indian spoke, there came in sight a man on foot.

He was dressed in black, sombrero and all, and came cautiously up the trail toward the canyon.

CHAPTER IV.

MET ON THE TRAIL.

MUELLO, the Mexican, was a very cunning man, and he had no idea of riding into his retreat without making a thorough reconnaissance of the place.

Nor did he intend to make the investigation himself, for his life was far more precious to him than were the lives of his men.

He had arrived within a few miles of the retreat, when suddenly a horseman appeared in the trail ahead of him.

He was well mounted and armed, and appeared to be awaiting the coming of the party of Black Bravos.

"It is Hunter Dave," said the chief, as he temporarily drew rein, and he gave a wave of his right hand which was instantly answered by the stranger with a wave of his left.

"All right, it is Hunter Dave," and the chief rode on more rapidly, bidding his men follow more slowly.

"Ah, cap'n, I'm awful glad ter meet yer, fer I were jist a-goin' up to ther retreat ter see if all I heerd were true; but I guesses it hain't," said the man, as he rode up.

"What did you hear, Hunter Dave?" anxiously asked the chief.

"I heerd as how yer prisoner, ther lieutenant, had escaped by Dashing Charlie playing it onter you that he was his Double, ther counterfeiter, and gittin' inter yer camp, and helpin' him out."

"Hal then that fellow was not the counterfeiter, who resembles the scout so much, but Dashing Charlie himself who came to join me?" savagely said the chief.

"So it seems, cap'n, and when you went off he tarning the lieutenant loose, and he went to ther fort and brought back his comp'ny of sogers and jist wiped out the gang, or leastwise that's ther news in Valley Camps, and I were coming to see yer and know ther truth."

"By Heaven! if this be true, then have I a score of revenge to settle that it will take me a long time to square," and the voice of the outlaw chief rung with his intense rage, while Hunter Dave could see his eyes burning like flames through the holes in his mask.

"Waal, cap'n, if them four men with yer is all yer has got, it won't be easy work I kin tell yer, for not one o' ther fellers left in ther retreat escaped, they says."

"Some must have done so."

"No, cap'n, all were kilt or tuk prisoners."

"Then as prisoners some of them must escape; but not a word of this to my men."

"No, cap'n, if you says so."

"I do say so, for if they hear it they will desert me and I must go on to the camp and see for myself."

"You knows best, cap'n, and I guesses I'll go back now, to my shanty, if yer kin find it convenient to pay me ther leetle money comin' to me as my share for bein' yer spy in Valley Camps."

"You too would leave me now Hunter Dave.

"But no, if you want your money you must go on to the retreat with me, for I will send scouts on to reconnoiter."

"I'll go, cap'n, for I hain't ther man to desert, and I guesses thar hain't nobody thar now ter hurt us."

"Well, you go ahead and reconnoiter, and I will wait in camp at the brook on ahead."

"Go now, Hunter Dave, for I do not wish the men to know, as I said."

The man did not seem to like the work, but he rode on up the trail, while the chief met his men and said pleasantly:

"It was Hunter Dave, men, and he has good news for us, which I cannot now make known."

They then rode on to the camp on the brook, and there Muello decided to await the return of Hunter Dave.

But he grew impatient at his delay in coming and sent another man on ahead.

Another hour passed away and a third man was dispatched in search of the others.

The other two began to grow uneasy at this, and Muello felt sure that he could not force them to go alone, and go himself he would not.

So he told them to leave their horses and proceed on foot, going together.

This they were willing to do, and so the chief was left alone in the camp on the brookside.

Once out of sight of his men he began to pace to and fro with quick, nervous strides.

"Am I to be doomed to utter disappointment?" he muttered.

"No, it must not, shall not be, for I will not be worsted by my foes, will not give up my determination to win gold."

"If my band is wiped out, there are other ways open to me, and I will seize upon them at once."

He continued to walk up and down for some time, until the long stay of his men alarmed him.

Hunter Dave had always been as true as steel to him, and yet now he seemed to have failed him.

Then the others he knew were to be trusted, for he had picked them for that purpose when starting upon his false trail after gold.

It certainly was very strange that not one of the five had returned.

They surely could not all have been ambushed, and besides, any shots fired as far off as his retreat he could have heard, for the sound would have come down the valley to him.

Looking around, he gave an impatient exclamation as he saw that his horse, which he had left unhitched, had strayed away back down the trail.

He at once set out on foot after him, and it was half an hour before his return.

As he came in sight of the camp, he suddenly drew back, for he saw an Indian mounting one of the horses left there by the last two men sent on the trail, and, leading the others, ride on toward the retreat.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISSING MEN.

MUELLO, the Mexican, was just in time to dodge back out of sight, and thus avoid being seen by Red Soldier, the Indian scout from Fort Blank.

Had he been seen by the red-skin, it would at once have become a game of hide and seek with intent to kill between himself and Red Soldier, with perhaps the chances in favor of the red-skin.

But the Indian was expecting five men, and he supposed that all five were present or accounted for.

So he mounted one of the horses in camp, and leading the others, the pack-animals, rode back on the trail toward the retreat.

"I must know what this means."

"There is only one, and he is that Indian scout, Red Soldier, so I need not dread him."

"But is he alone?"

"Ah! that is the question; but he evidently thinks that there are no more to come of my party."

"That is lucky for me."

"My presence will not be suspected, so I can reconnoiter with safety and know what has become of my missing men."

"That red-skin is a dangerous enemy, but I must take chances and see what the trouble is."

"Surely all of my men cannot have ridden into an ambush and were killed or captured."

"I have not heard a shot fired either."

"Fortunately, I have my traps with me, and not upon one of those pack-horses."

"I will go on foot from here, for it is safer."

With this decision he went over in a ravine, and secured his horse.

Then he took the trail on foot.

It was hardly three miles to his retreat, and he felt that with foes near, as indicated by the Indian's presence, he would have to go slow and with the greatest caution.

He avoided every suspicious-looking place on the trail ahead, where an ambushed foe might lie hidden, by flanking the spot.

Soon he came to where a horse had been fastened just off the trail, and he knew one of his men had left the animal there.

But the tracks showed also that on his way back the Indian had halted there and secured the horse.

Further on he came to where a second horse had been tethered, and arriving within half a mile of the retreat was the hitching-stake of a third animal.

"That accounts for the three horses ridden by Hunter Dave and my other two men, the three who went mounted. They were evidently afraid to go on, mounted, so took the trail afoot."

"But now, to find the men, for the red-skin has certainly captured all the horses of the outfit."

He went on more cautiously than ever now, and at last came in sight of the break in the pine-clad cliff marking the rocky gateway to the canyon where had been his retreat.

He approached from rock to rock, tree to tree, his desire to learn the fate of the missing men urging him on to risk the danger to himself of a covert shot.

At last he reached the entrance to the canyon and pressed into the valley beyond, small, fertile, heavily wooded and half a mile in length, while a brook, fed by mountain springs, also found an outlet through the break in the rocky rampart.

On he went, often, with his glass, searching every rock, tree and slope in the canyon.

But, as he reached the spot where the pass widened he halted suddenly.

No wonder that he did so, for his eyes fell upon a sight appalling, that caused a shudder to pass through his strong frame.

There, before the eyes of the masked outlaw chief, lay the bodies of the five missing men, the last of his band, and in the heart of each was sticking an arrow, showing that an avenger had been upon their trail.

"My God! I am the last of my band!" cried Muello, the Mexican, in a voice of horror at the sight that confronted him.

The man, outlaw though he was, knew but little of fear.

He was not one to count odds when he felt it was his duty to risk his life, yet he was not a man to throw that life away, for he loved it but too well and was ambitious to win a fortune that far away from those scenes he might live in luxury as suited his humor.

The moment he discovered the five dead forms lying before him, he sprung to cover with remarkable quickness and presence of mind.

Those who had slain his men might have a shot for him too.

For a long while he remained hidden, until at last his eyes fell upon a fresh trail coming out of the canyon.

The trail was evidently not more than an hour old, and was made by half a dozen or more horses.

"That Indian was alone in his red work I am sure, for he has left the place with the captured horses."

"Yes, and he believes that he has killed me. By Heaven! but it must be so believed by all, for I will have it so."

As he said this he left his place of hiding, and went toward his dead comrades.

"Killed with arrows all of them, and each one nearer the canyon than the other, for here are the two last, and one turned to fly, for he is shot in the back."

"And all have been scalped and robbed."

"Well, I will have one appear to be Muello, the Mexican, and Tonio is the man, for he is a Mexican."

So saying, he drew from his face his mask and placed it in the pocket of the man he had called Tonio.

Then he took several things from his own pockets, and transferred them to those of the dead man.

"The Indian will tell his story, and they will send soldiers from the fort to see if it is true, and bury the dead, and it must be said that Muello, the Mexican, is no more; but instead, some one will find Muello, the Mexican, very much alive."

"Now I am ready to leave this spot, which, but for my meeting with Hunter Dave, would have been fatal to me as well as to the others."

"So it will be said that Muello and his Black Bravos have been utterly wiped out; but we shall see, we shall see!"

"It was your destiny, my men, to die here; it shall be mine to live, and win a fortune and revenge."

So saying, he walked rapidly through the canyon, glanced at the deserted camps, the two groups of graves, and retracing his steps to where he had left his horse, mounted and rode away just as darkness fell upon the earth.

CHAPTER VI.

AT FORT BLANK.

COLONEL GABRIEL BUCKNER was the commandant of Fort Blank and the military district embracing many miles around it.

He made the fort his headquarters, and it was too well fortified and garrisoned to dread an attack even from the largest bands of Indians that the tribes could put into the field, for there

was a cavalry battalion there to throw a force of three hundred mounted men upon the trail in short notice, a light battery of artillery, and a dozen or so companies of infantry always kept in the best marching trim and all under thorough discipline.

Then, too, Dashing Charlie, chief of scouts, had under his command a dozen brave fellows, always ready to face odds of red-skins ten to one, and in charge of the Government cattle at the fort were some two-score cowboys who made dangerous foes to fight.

Teamsters, hangers-on and others rendered the garrison a large one, not to speak of the many married officers who had their families with them, for Fort Blank was a most delightful station.

There was an army sutler there, and a store kept by an ex-army-officer as well, while in the neighborhood of the fort was a small mining-camp and a few settlers had located, making altogether quite a populous community.

A stage from the fort made semi-monthly runs in and out on the eastward trail, and a wagon train was wont to arrive and depart from the fort every two months.

Colonel Buckner was the most popular man in the army, and his whole life had been tinged with romance, for, coming from an old Virginia family, he had when a mere youth killed his best friend in a duel forced upon him, and relinquishing the fortune that was to be his, and giving up kindred and all, he had entered the frontier army as a private, and by gallantry and devoted attention to his duties risen rapidly to the rank of a colonel.

Just before the opening of this story, Colonel Buckner had adopted as his daughter a child of a dearly loved sister, whose husband had gone to Texas to live.

There his sister had died, and years afterward he had met his brother-in-law, Richard Markham, when he had gone to New Mexico under the guidance of Dashing Charlie, sent by the ranchero's dying brother to fetch him.

The fortune in gold left by the old miner to his niece had been the cause of Richard Markham's losing his life in trying to carry it to Texas, and, soon after his death, his daughter, Beatrice, had started under the escort of Lieutenant Frederic Gibbs, the colonel's aide and kinsman, to go to the fort, and upon the way the officer had been made prisoner by Muello, the Mexican, as has been told, while Dashing Charlie had escaped with the maiden to the fort.

It was some weeks after the attack on the outlaws' retreat, that Colonel Buckner was seated upon the piazza of his commodious cabin, one pleasant afternoon, conversing with his *aide-de-camp*, when they were joined by two ladies, and as the sentinel pacing to and fro on his beat near saw them, he mentally observed:

"I never saw four finer-looking folks in one group than they are."

And the sentinel was right, for the colonel was a handsome, distinguished-looking man of forty, looking every inch the soldier, while his *aide*, Frederic Gibbs, was known as the handsomest young officer on the frontier, and as popular and brave as he was good-looking.

Of the two ladies one was perhaps twenty-four, with a form of faultless symmetry, and a face of rarest loveliness, with great sleepy black eyes in striking contrast to her red-gold hair.

She was dressed in black and wore no ornament save a ring of unique design.

Her companion was a young girl of seventeen, with a face and form scarcely less beautiful, and the close-fitting blue-cloth suit she wore, trimmed with gold lace and cavalry buttons, with a black sombrero looped up with a gold Texan star, and enriched by a gold cord, gave her a very military air.

The former was Miss Creola Gray, a young lady who had come to Fort Blank in search of a long-missing brother, and who had been robbed by Muello, the Mexican, with the other passengers on the stage-coach.

Through the kindness of Colonel Buckner, to whom she had told her sad story, she had been installed as teacher to the children of the officers at the fort.

The maiden with her was Beatrice Markham Buckner, the niece and adopted daughter of the colonel, and the heiress to the miner's gold which had cost her father's life, and inheriting her fortune as well, with a chance it was said of becoming the heir also of Colonel Buckner, for he had won riches as well as fame on the frontier.

When the ladies approached, the colonel and lieutenant were discussing the mysterious disappearance from the hospital, where he had been suffering from injuries received in a combat with a bear, of Red Soldier, a Pawnee, and a favorite scout with the colonel.

He had slipped out of his bed in the hospital, and in some mysterious manner left the fort unseen by any of the sentinels, and much anxiety was felt by all regarding the fate of the Indian scout.

CHAPTER VII. AN ARRIVAL.

COLONEL BUCKNER was very proud of his daring nephew, and he had been talking over

with him, as the two sat together upon the piazza, the story of his captivity among the outlaws.

"You tell me, Fred," he said, for when alone and off duty he called the lieutenant by his Christian name, "that you had no chance of seeing the face of Muello, the Mexican, the whole time you were his prisoner?"

"I had not, sir, for he was closely masked as man possibly could be.

"Why, I did not even see him with ungloved hands, and I could not find one peculiarity about him to remember."

"Nor could Dashing Charlie, he told me, and if he gives up his life of outlawry, now that his band has been wiped out, except the four men with him, I fear we shall never catch him."

"I feel so, too, sir, and I regret exceedingly that it is so, for I would give much to capture that man."

"Yes, he caused you to suffer greatly, and I do not wonder that you feel revengeful; but now what do you make out of this mysterious disappearance of my Pawnee scout, Red Soldier?"

"I fear, sir, that in his delirium he has wandered off somewhere to die, and if you desire it, I will take a squad in search of him."

"I did send the scouts, you know, but they found no trace of him, and I fear it is too late now, while you know that Dashing Charlie has gone to look him up."

"No, sir, has he?"

"Yes, he left yesterday."

"Then there is no need of any one else going, for if he is to be found Dashing Charlie is the man to do it."

"You have had a thorough experience of that fact, Fred," the colonel said, with a smile.

"Indeed I have, sir, for I would not be alive now, had Muello, the Mexican, returned from that wild-geese chase I sent him on after that gold, and Dashing Charlie is the man who saved me by playing the bold game of pretending to be the counterfeiter Lennox who had so often played his Double."

"I shall never forget that experience, colonel; but here come Cousin Beatrice and Miss Gray."

"Yes, Miss Gray appears devoted to Beatrice, who, I fear, does not return her affection for some reason."

"I have noticed that Cousin Beatrice appears to shun her at times, and why I cannot understand, for to me Miss Creola Gray is a most beautiful and charming woman."

"And to me also is she; but our sweet little kinswoman is very decided in her likes and dislikes, and I must admit that she is a remarkable reader of human nature for one so young."

"And a woman, too," added the lieutenant, with a smile.

"Yes, and, do you know, she does not like our friend the Gentleman Sport, either."

"Yes, I have also noticed that she does not care for Grayson Gurney, either, Colonel Buckner, though with every one else he is most popular."

"He is a fine fellow, I think, though eccentric at times, and a little hard to fathom."

"He certainly is in love with Cousin Beatrice, sir."

"So I have thought; but there is no danger of a reciprocity of his love on her part, so there is no cause for alarm," and the colonel cast a sly glance at his young kinsman.

"I hope not," was the low-muttered reply of Lieutenant Gibbs, and he arose as Creola Gray, the lovely teacher, and Beatrice Buckner came up the piazza steps.

The colonel also arose and received them most cordially, and they were invited to take seats upon the piazza, as soon as they had gotten rid of the armful of wild flowers they carried.

"I went over near to the school-house, Papa Buckner, for a walk, and Miss Gray was still there, though she had dismissed the children, and pressed me into service to help her bring home the quantities of flowers her pupils had gathered for her."

"Are they not beautiful?" said Beatrice, looking very beautiful herself with her face flushed from exercise.

"They are indeed lovely," answered the colonel, and as he gazed into the deep, dreamy eyes of Creola Gray, he added:

"Most lovely indeed."

But he did not mean the flowers then, for the beauty of the fair stranger had fascinated him.

The conversation then became general, and in the midst of it there was seen to be some cause of excitement down at the main stockade gate leading into the fort.

Several officers and some soldiers were seen hastening in that direction, and Lieutenant Gibbs hastily rose and said:

"I will see what it means, colonel, for there appears to be some cause of alarm."

He saluted, bowed to the ladies, and walked rapidly away in the direction of the gates, but had not proceeded far when a horseman dashed into the stockade and came at a rapid gallop toward headquarters, while his coming was greet-

ed with a cheer by the soldiers who caught sight of him.

"Hal! it is Dashing Charlie. There is danger afoot for him to ride so," cried Colonel Buckner, as the scout drew rein before his quarters.

CHAPTER VIII.

DASHING CHARLIE, THE SCOUT.

THERE had been an Indian battle at the fort of late, or rather near it, in which Dashing Charlie had been the means of averting what might have been a severe disaster, by a timely warning of the presence of the red-skins in large force near the fort.

There had followed, a few weeks later, the capture of the outlaws' retreat, also through the instrumentality of Dashing Charlie.

He had rescued Beatrice Buckner from the power of Muello, the Mexican, as he afterward had Lieutenant Gibbs, and all these things considered, were cause enough for excitement among those at the fort when the scout was seen coming at breakneck pace toward the stockade gates, mounted upon his roan stallion, Comanche, which thus far had not met his equal for speed and endurance on the frontier.

Dashing Charlie was not the man to ride that way unless he had good reason for doing so.

And then, too, he had given a signal of alarm when two miles away.

At that distance there was a high ridge, over which the trail wound, and upon the point that was highest a pole was erected with flag halyards.

In a hiding-place near were concealed several signal flags, their place of hiding known to the scouts, and if danger threatened a red flag would be run up to the top and left flying.

It was the duty of the sentinel on the post at the stockade to cast his eyes toward the ridge at every turn in his beat, and thus the "alarm flag" had been discovered, while the scout was seen coming like the very wind toward the fort.

The officer of the day had been called, and by the time he gave the alarm the fleet roan had brought the scout to the post, and he had dashed through and ridden straight toward headquarters, where he drew rein and leaped to the ground, saluting Colonel Buckner and his aide politely, and raising his broad sombrero in salutation to Creola Gray and Beatrice.

Though he had ridden with such desperate speed, as he faced the commandant the scout was as cool as an icicle, not showing by look or manner that he had aught of a startling nature to reveal.

He was a man standing all of six feet, with a slender-appearing form, yet one that had muscles of steel and bones of iron, for not a man in the fort was his equal in strength, while he was as quick as a wildcat in his movements.

He was dressed in buckskin leggings and hunting-shirt, top-boots and a sombrero with exceedingly wide brim, while he was armed thoroughly with rifle and revolvers.

His face was carved in a mold of daring and determination, his blue eyes seeming to pierce through one when he turned them upon you, while his hair was worn very long and was of a golden hue.

His horse was a splendid animal, a long-bodied gaunt roan stallion, with equipments that looked as though gotten ready for a long trail, for there was his provision-bag, some cooking utensils, rubber spreads and a roll of blankets, with a pair of saddle-bags for ammunition, extra clothing, and a case of surgical instruments and medicines.

"Well, Dashing Charlie, what news do you bring of Red Soldier, the Pawnee?" asked the colonel quickly, as the scout approached, for he was sure that he brought important news of some kind.

"Shall I speak before the ladies, sir?"

"Certainly, for I know they are all most curious to know," and the colonel smiled.

"Well, sir, Red Soldier is corralled in the mountains twenty miles from here, with the Gentleman Sport and his scout, Dick Darling, and the chances are against them, for there are all of three hundred Indians that they have to stand off."

"Hal! this is bad."

"Lieutenant Gibbs, at once order Captain Arleigh out with two troops of picked men and horses to go the rescue, and Captain Dunn to follow with three more troops and two light guns."

"Will you lead as guide, Dashing Charlie?"

"Oh, yes, sir, but I will take another horse, for I rode Comanche near fifteen miles in less than an hour."

"I will prepare at once, sir."

"I will send an orderly to bring your other horse, while I talk to you, and my daughter will order a meal prepared for you," the colonel said.

Dashing Charlie bowed in acquiescence, while the colonel sent his orderly after the horse the scout designated as the one he wished to ride, and Beatrice disappeared indoors to order refreshments for him, and excusing herself Creola Gray followed her.

"Now, scout, let me know just what the situation is?" said the colonel, motioning to Dashing

Charlie to be seated, for he looked worn as from a hard ride.

"Well, sir, I took an idea that Red Soldier had gone off on a lone scout, and after considerable search I struck his trail."

"What he was doing he can best report to you, if he gets out of his present scrape; but I came across an Indian trail, and a large one, and flanking to warn you, heard firing."

"I scouted near and with my glass discovered Red Soldier, Mr. Grayson Gurney and the scout Dick Darling, corraled upon a rocky hill, and the Indians surrounding them and some three hundred in number."

"I then rode with all speed to the fort, sir."

"You did well, and you must lead the rescue party with all speed to their relief," was the determined response of the colonel.

CHAPTER IX.

TROOPERS TO THE RESCUE.

"So Mr. Gurney is corraled with the Pawnee, scout?" said Colonel Buckner with considerable interest.

"Yes, sir."

"And his private guide and scout also?"

"Yes, colonel, Dick Darling is also there."

"Did you see any one else?"

"My glass revealed but these three, sir. And it struck me they were in a very close place, with so many red-skins to stand off."

"They certainly are; but from where did these red-skins come?"

"From the lower country, sir, and they are, in my opinion, what we call an avenging band, picked warriors and horses on the hunt for scalps, to wipe out their last defeat."

"They will have another defeat to wipe out if Captain Arleigh reaches them," said the colonel, grimly.

"I hope so, sir."

"But I am glad to learn something of the Pawnee, Dashing Charlie, for I am very much attached to that Indian."

"As he is to you, Colonel Buckner."

"Yes; I believe he is, and has been, as he says, my red brother ever since I saved his life several years ago."

"He will never forget your saving him from that bear, scout; but how is it that he is with the Gentleman Sport?"

"I don't know, sir, unless they have met upon the trail; but I am confident from what I saw that Red Soldier will have a tale to tell you, sir."

"Well, I am glad to hear of Gurney and his guide also, for it has been some time since he left the fort, and all were becoming most anxious about him."

"He takes big chances, Dashing Charlie, going on these long hunts as he does, with only the scout Dick Darling with him."

"Yes, sir; but he appears to be a perfect frontiersman, and Darling is a splendid scout and guide I must admit, though I do not like him."

"Nor do I, for he always appears tricky to me, though I may wrong him; but Beatrice announces that you are to go in and eat something, and by the time you have done so your horse will be here and the troopers ready."

Beatrice had prepared a very tempting repast, and she and Creola Gray remained while he ate it, asking him as to what danger there was threatening the Gentleman Sport, his guide, and the Pawnee.

"If we get there in time, they will be all right, and if not, then we will have to avenge them," was Dashing Charlie's frank response, while Creola Gray remarked:

"Do you know I have never met Mr. Grayson Gurney yet?"

"Indeed!" said Beatrice, with surprise.

"No; for he has been off on a hunting expedition ever since I came to the fort, and I confess, from all I have heard of him, that I have a strong desire to meet him, even though it is predicted that I will fall in love with him."

"Well, you will have to guard well your heart, Miss Gray, for he is said to be a most fascinating man."

"Have you not found him so?" slyly asked the pretty teacher.

"Perhaps I am not a competent judge," was the remark of Beatrice, and as a bugle-call was heard, Dashing Charlie hastily arose, thanked Beatrice for her hospitality, and went out upon the piazza to find his fresh horse there awaiting him.

As Comanche did not allow any one else than his master to touch him, the scout hastily transferred his saddle and bridle and sent his roan to his pen.

Just then Lieutenant Fred Gibbs came out booted and spurred for the saddle, and the bugle called for the start.

"Why, Fred, are you going?" asked the colonel.

"Oh, yes, sir, though I forgot to ask you; but I thought Captain Arleigh would need an aide."

"Very true, and as it is impossible to keep you out of a fight, I suppose you will have to go."

"Good luck to you all!" and the colonel and the ladies waved as the troopers filed by, the

headquarter band playing "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

"You know the way, Dashing Charlie, Lieutenant Gibbs tells me, and just the need of haste, so set the pace and we will follow," said Captain Langley Arleigh, as they rode through the stockade gates, just half an hour after the scout's arrival.

With a salute Dashing Charlie did "set the pace," and it was a rapid one, too, as all could see who watched the troopers in a gallop go over the distant ridge out of sight.

Hardly had they disappeared when Captain Dunn reported ready with his reserve of troopers and two light guns, and to have more men ready if needed, Colonel Buckner ordered five companies of infantry and two more guns, with Kit Kirby and six scouts, and half a dozen mounted couriers to follow at a quick march.

The result was that five hundred Boys in Blue were on the way within little over an hour after Dashing Charlie's arrival at the fort, while the whole garrison was under arms to meet whatever might be in store for them.

In the mean time the scout, acting as guide, did not draw rein until he reached the ridge.

Behind him came Captain Arleigh and Lieutenant Gibbs side by side, with the troopers following.

A walk over the ridge, and Dashing Charlie started off in a sweeping gallop again, the picked horses of the troopers keeping up splendidly.

With short walks to breathe the animals at the rough places, Dashing Charlie held on.

Night fell, but the speed was kept up until at last the scout halted, for there came to the ears of all the rapid rattle of fire-arms in the distance.

The corraled party still held out, but it sounded like a death-struggle to all who heard the firing.

CHAPTER X.

RED SOLDIER'S MAN-HUNT.

RED SOLDIER was a man equal to all dangerous or trying situations. If a boaster, as are all Indians, he had the courage of his race.

So when he decided to take chances in getting the scalps of Muello the Mexican and his men, he well knew the chances were that he might lose his own in the attempt.

He was prepared however to face all dangers and difficulties, and expected that it would be a short, sharp fight.

To his great delight he saw that the five men did not come together, mounted. Instead, he beheld one man working his way cautiously along, on foot.

That man was Hunter Dave. He advanced as though prepared to meet a foe, and expected to find one at every step.

One was waiting for him, who, in spite of his prudence, Hunter Dave did not see.

There among the rocks, his face concealed by a broken pine bough which he had placed before him to represent a scrub-tree, sat the Indian, a complacent look upon his painted face, which was still scarred and seamed by the wounds received in his fight with the bear, some weeks before.

He was on the alert, for he had the outlaw spy covered, not with his rifle, but by his bow and arrow, which terrible weapon was held ready in his hand.

Into the pass came Hunter Dave, glancing into the canyon beyond with unusual caution. Seeing no one, he straightened up, convinced that no enemy was there.

Fatal miscalculation!

At that moment was heard a sharp *twang*; a whirring sound followed, and the barbed arrow entered the breast of the outlaw!

With a moan Hunter Dave sunk in his tracks, while quickly the Indian fitted another arrow to his bow and waited, muttering as he did so:

"Red Soldier big brave."

"Heap glad me not drunk this time. No, not drunk. Red Soldier swear off fire-water. Good!"

"Now must wait for more scalp. Big Injun, Red Soldier, now. Other men come by'm-by."

He was right; they did come—one at a time.

With stoic patience he sat there, not in the least disturbed by the long wait before another victim appeared in the pass.

This time he did not allow the man to get far enough into the canyon to see his dead comrade.

Having killed two of the outlaw band, Red Soldier changed his position to a spot in the rocky opening, and from there brought down outlaw number three.

"Me have heap good time! Bully fun! No drunk now! Wait and kill more!"

Changing his position again, the red-skin waited with the same untiring patience as before, to at last behold two men approaching.

"Two come now. Good! Must shoot heap quick," his thoughts ran.

He placed several arrows, taken from his quiver, upon the rocks by his side, then waited until the two men got within closer range, and in sight of their dead companions.

At that moment he sent an arrow on its unerring way.

It reached its life target, and, as the man

fell, the other turned and bounded away, realizing that he was in an ambush. One glance he had caught of the dead stretched out in line before him in the pass was enough.

With the speed of a frightened deer he was bounding away, when an arrow flew by his head.

This but quickened his pace, but, if Red Soldier had missed his aim once, it was not to be so a second time; his next shot found its target, and the man fell in a heap as he ran.

A wild war-whoop of triumph broke from the lips of the delighted chief, Red Soldier, as he stepped from his place of concealment and held aloft his fatal bow and rushed toward his victim, his scalping-knife in hand instead of his bow and arrows.

"Five time kill! Heap plenty scalp! Red Soldier so glad he laugh."

But he did not laugh. Only a grim smile lit up his scarred face, and in a moment more bent over Hunter Dave, and, with a quick twirl of his blade around the hair of his victim, tore his scalp-lock from his head.

The five scalp-locks were hung at his belt, and then he began an equally pleasant duty to him of robbing the dead.

Their rifles and belts-of-arms were taken first, and then they were searched for valuables.

"Which chief?"

"Don't know; but he here."

"Only five go; five come back."

"Red Soldier have five scalps."

"Heap glad."

"Now get horses."

With this determination he put the weapons and valuables away and went off on a hunt for the horses.

He took the trails of the men back, and was not long in finding first one and then the other of the horses.

For once he was too much occupied to see that there was one more than five in the band.

But he only counted on five, and so got that many saddle-horses and the pack-animals.

Upon each of the bodies he had found some money, so, with seven horses, for there were two pack-animals, and the weapons, outfits and other things, not to speak of food, the Indian chief concluded that he was a very rich man.

Having gotten his traps together, put his fire-arms upon one of the pack-horses, the red-skin left the dead unburied and started upon his return to the fort.

CHAPTER XI.

FLYING FOR LIFE.

No man ever felt prouder of an achievement, than did Red Soldier the Pawnee, when he got together the horses of the outlaws, their traps and weapons, and mounting the best animal of the lot started off for the fort.

He had the others all in lead by hitching the bridle of each to the tail of the horse before him, and in this way the Indian chief started to the fort to report his grand capture of five scalps and seven horses.

"Me heap great chief," he muttered as he rode along, and such was his elation at his exploit, that he would quickly have halted to fight the real chief of the outlaws, had he for a moment suspected that Muello the Mexican had escaped him.

So on his way he went until night came on, when he went into camp, not wishing to risk a ride through the darkness.

The next morning he was up bright and early and had ridden several miles upon his way at a slow pace, for he could not ride fast hampered as he was with his horses in lead, when suddenly he came to a halt.

Just there two trails met, and he heard the rapid clatter of hoofs coming up one of the trails.

Listening attentively a moment he said:

"Two."

Then he added, as though having made another discovery:

"Not Indian, but pale face."

"Horse have iron shoe."

This, his keen sense of hearing and instinct combined told him.

"Maybe outlaw," he added.

"If outlaw must fight."

"Heap good! two more scalps."

But another idea crossed his mind for he said:

"But outlaw all dead."

"No night time, no white spirit soldier call ghost."

"Maybe scouts."

"Soon see," and as he could not run with his outfit the Indian dismounted, hitched his horses and stood ready to fight it out if those coming were his foes.

He had not long to wait when two horsemen dashed into sight.

They were riding at a sweeping gallop along the trail and coming directly upon the ambushed Indian.

But he seemed to recognize them, for he sprung from his ambush out into the trail, and called out:

"Me glad! Red Soldier heap glad to meet pale-face pards."

The two men drew rein with remarkable sud-

denness, and their revolvers were drawn ready to fight, when one called out:

"Hold, Dick! it is Red Soldier, the Pawnee!" The two men were splendidly mounted, equipped and armed. The one whom his comrade had called Dick was dressed in buckskin, and was a fine-looking man of thirty, but with a face that was bold, reckless and sinister.

The other was one who might justly be termed a superb-looking man.

He was six feet in height, of graceful, athletic form, with small hands and feet, and sat his horse like a Texan mustanger.

He was dressed in a dark corduroy hunting-suit, high cavalry boots, and a black sombrero ornamented with a gold eagle.

His arms were of the very best, his spurs were of gold, and he protected his hands with gauntlet gloves.

His hair was worn short, and his face was beardless, full of expression and one to command admiration at a glance.

The two men who confronted Red Soldier, the Pawnee chief, were known at the fort as Grayson Gurney, the Gentleman Sport, and Dick Darling, his scout and guide.

"It is the Red Soldier, sir," answered Dick Darling, the guide, in answer to the remark of the Gentleman Sport.

"Me Red Soldier all right," said the Indian.

"Well, chief, there is no time to talk, for we have Indians upon our track, and fear we are headed off in the valley trail."

"Who have you along?" and the horseman glanced at the horses seen through the foliage ahead.

"Only horses of bad pale-faces me kill."

"Well, our horses are used up, so what shall we do?"

"Make a stand, I say, sir," Dick Darling called out.

"Or perhaps the chief knows where we can hide."

"Hard to hide from red-skin; but try, and good place make big fight," answered the chief, and springing upon his horse he led the way back on the trail, the two horsemen behind keeping his led animals at a gallop.

The Pawnee knew every foot of the country there, and had in mind a safe hiding-place, or at least one where they could fight at a great advantage.

He was surprised, after the recent fight with the Indians, in which they had been so severely whipped by the troops, that others had ventured thus near the fort again, but he supposed they were only a small band in pursuit of the two horsemen and were making a rapid raid through the country.

The place he led the way to was indeed a safe retreat.

It was a cone-like hill, with such rugged, steep sides that there was but one place where horses could make their way to the summit.

Once there the top was like the crater of an old volcano, and some forty feet in diameter.

In this bowl-like space there was ample room for the horses, and the rocky edge proved a breastwork for the defenders, who could command the approach to the hill-top completely.

When they had reached this place of safety, Red Soldier heard from Grayson Gurney that there were several hundred of Indians in pursuit of them, and had he known this he would have held on to the fort; but it was too late now, for their foes were in sight and they must stand at bay and fight them off.

There was no other alternative, for they were cut off from one of their number going on to the fort for aid.

CHAPTER XII.

FIGHTING FOR LIFE.

RED SOLDIER was not one to show what he felt; but when he learned how many warriors were upon the trail of the Gentleman Sport and his guide, a look of disappointment did sweep over his face.

He seemed to realize that there was an excellent chance of his losing the five scalps he had taken, his horses and his own scalp in the bargain.

He knew of a trail by which he could have eluded the party in the valley and kept on to the fort, had he suspected the red-skins were in great numbers, for if the horses of the two fugitives were used up the ponies of their Indian pursuers must also be, and they could have made it a running fight to the fort, and when their shots were heard relief would come to them.

But the horsemen had not told him this, and now they were caught like rats in a trap and must fight for it.

It was lucky for the little party at bay on the hilltop that the red-skins supposed them to be of much larger force than they were.

They had come upon the Gentleman Sport and Dick Darling miles back and had a hot chase, sending off parties at the valley trail to head them off.

But when they reached the mountain trail, they saw a fresh trail there of seven horses.

This, to them, meant that the two fugitives had met as many more riders.

Doubtless these were scouts from the fort, and bad men to fight.

When they came in sight of the hill, they saw no one there, and the rocky ground all around it prevented a trail from being left, as Red Soldier had known.

The Indians had divided in three parties, to prevent the horsemen from reaching the fort and giving the alarm.

Now, the one in close pursuit must discover where their foes had taken refuge, and they accordingly dismounted, to give their ponies a rest and food, and set to work on foot.

Couriers had also been sent to call in the other two parties, as it was known that the fugitives could not escape from the ridge without being seen.

Up in the crater the three men lay as quiet as mice, though watching, through crevices in the rocks, the movements of their red foes.

And little they dreamed that afar off, on another hill, Dashing Charlie, with a field-glass to his eye, was watching them and their foes as well, for he had seen them hunt the retreat up the hill at a gallop.

Had they known this, they would have felt more content in their perilous situation.

That they might discover whether their foes had taken refuge upon the hilltop, the red-skins sent a couple of scouts to reconnoiter.

They were very cautious in their advance, and at last came to a place where they saw traces of a trail.

They bent over it, arose quickly, and were about to signal their having made a discovery, when a couple of sharp reports rung out from the hilltop and the two Indian scouts dropped dead.

Like a covey of partridges hunting cover the Indians broke for hiding-places.

They had lost two of their number, but they had found where their foes had taken refuge.

They did not like the position at all, but they could not help themselves.

They would have made an immediate dash, but they supposed they had nine men to fight, and men who knew how to use the rifle, as they had just discovered.

Then, too, there were few fire-arms among them, and, Indian like, when placed in a quandary, they had to have a council-of-war and await the coming up of the other two bands.

A few young braves did break through the restraint of older heads and make a feint of a dash up toward the hill-top.

But they had cause to regret it as having made a mistake, for there were three shots heard and three warriors went down among the adventurous band.

This settled it, that a council was necessary to determine what was to be done, the more so as five shots had been fired and as many braves had bitten the dust.

This showed that the men on the hill-top were so confident of their deadly aim that they fired no more shots than were necessary.

At least that was the way they looked at it.

The defenders were rejoiced at their success thus far, and, Red Soldier showed up his captured rifles, which gave each of the three two apiece, and a couple to spare, with no less than a double extra revolvers.

"We can open a fire upon them with all these weapons which will make them think we are a dozen men," said the Gentleman Sport, with enthusiasm.

Feeling that thus far they held the advantage, the two white men and the red-skin ate dinner and congratulated themselves upon the food they had along.

There was nothing for the horses to eat and no water, but both the Gentleman Sport and Dick Darling carried a flask of whisky, and it must serve as well.

But the memory of his having gotten drunk and being nearly killed by a bear was too fresh in the memory of the Pawnee for him to indulge, and he said:

"Me swore off; bad medicine; make Red Soldier heap sick."

After an hour's time one of the other bands arrived, and later on the second one, and then came a rush of picked warriors for the hilltop, and the battle for life had begun.

But the rattle of the eight rifles sent death into the ranks of the charging red-skins, and the revolvers being drawn and fired rapidly, checked the rush and sent their foes back down the hill to hunt cover.

"Wait for night now."

"Then come," said Red Soldier.

And he was right, for soon after nightfall the Indians came in full force in a mighty rush toward the hilltop.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESCUE.

HAD it not been for the extra weapons brought by Red Soldier, the Pawnee, there would have been no check to the red-skins in their mad charge up the steep hill.

The way was rugged, and at best the Indians could make but slow progress, while the eight rifles, and a score of revolvers rapidly fired sent a terrible fire upon the climbing mass of humanity.

But the Comanches were out for revenge and scalps, and they did not believe more than nine men were upon the hilltop, for they judged by the hoof-marks of the horses seen.

They wished to quickly end this affair, get the scalps, and, what was even more welcome, the weapons of the pale-faces.

They would then make a midnight dash upon the settlement, killing and burning under the very guns of the fort, and make their escape.

They would capture the corral at the fort, thus mounting themselves upon fresh horses, and with them get away while the soldiers were preparing to risk attack.

Their plans were well laid, and but for the discovery of their coming by Dashing Charlie would have been partly successful.

Had they captured or killed the Gentleman Sport, there would have been no alarm at the fort until they were upon the settlements and corrals, as not the slightest dread of an Indian raid was felt, after their terrible defeat of a short while before.

Red Soldier was not in dread of meeting any Indians either, or at least more than a small prowling band, and he too would have been captured, killed, or run away from the direction of the fort rather than toward it.

But the lynx-eyed scout, Dashing Charlie, had discovered the Indians on the march, then the party at bay on top of the hill, and he had gone with all the speed of his wonderful roan to give an alarm of danger, and to lead back a force to the rescue.

Such was the situation as it presented itself, yet unknown to the defenders in the crater that there was the slightest reason to hope for success.

When the Comanches had first been driven back, the Gentleman Sport had congratulated himself that they would be kept at bay through the night, and their presence known in the fort, for the firing, high up in the air, as it was, by night, might be heard at the fort and relief come.

But after a second advance the defenders felt sure that the Indians were looking for bigger game than they were, and even if a number of warriors were sacrificed, they would take the place in a mighty rush.

As the advance began the Gentleman Sport began to bemoan his fate.

He was fond of life, and held dreams for the future which were now to quickly end in the grave.

The thought made him revengeful, and he was determined to make his assailants suffer bitterly.

"Bitter shall their triumph be," he muttered through his shut teeth.

Every weapon was loaded and placed close at hand on the rocks, and where no flying arrows would knock them off, and beyond reach.

Then came the advance, heralded by showers of arrows, followed by ear-splitting yells and a mad rush by maddened savages.

Braves went down dead and dying before that fatal fire of the three men at bay, the Gentleman Sport, Red Soldier the Pawnee, and Dick Darling the guide.

The three knew only that death, and torture before death, if not killed by some befriending arrow before capture, was before them, and grim and determined they stood facing their foes to sell their lives at dearest cost to those who sought them.

Just when the leading warriors were within twenty steps of the hill-top, when the last revolver had been emptied, when hope was gone, there came a long, piercing, wild war-cry.

It was well-known as the terrible war-cry of Dashing Charlie the White Scalper, and it seemed to paralyze the Indian warriors in the very moment of victory.

But short would have been their hesitancy, had that war-cry alone reached their ears.

What would that horde of savages have heeded one, or a dozen men?

But following the cry came the ringing notes of a bugle, and the cheers of a hundred Boys in Blue.

"We are saved!" shouted the Gentleman Sport in an ecstasy of delight.

"Dashing Charlie save us! He see Comanche, go to fort for soldier—me know," said Red Soldier, and hastily reloading their weapons the three men mounted their horses and sallied forth to join in the battle now raging at the base of the hill where the cavalry had charged upon the Comanches.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISSING.

DASHING CHARLIE had not spared the spur, and his horse had been held at a pace as he led the rescue party that kept the soldiers on their mettle to keep up.

Splendidly mounted themselves, both Captain Arleigh and Lieutenant Gibbs were anxious to push on.

The captain knew that Captain Dunn was his ranking officer, and also was well aware that the latter was a pusher, a hard marcher and a fierce fighter.

Dashing Charlie's Man-Hunt.

He was coming on as a support to him, Arleigh, and that meant that he would be very near when needed.

If driven back upon the support, then Captain Dunn would take command.

Dashing Charlie had said that he thought the red-skins numbered three hundred braves. Of course there might be more, but there certainly were no less.

If surprised, then the soldiers had greatly the advantage, and if not, the gallant captain was not the man to hold back where it was only three red-skins to one Boy in Blue.

He was heartily supported in these views by Lieutenant Gibbs, and the aide was a great power at the fort, as all knew.

Then, the man ahead, Dashing Charlie, held the confidence of all, and as long as he said "Go," go it should be.

Fortunately for the soldiers, Dashing Charlie led them through a sandy bottom and then around to the base of the hill, and the sand and the hill between them and the Indians cut off all sound of their approach.

The firing was heard by the soldiers, and the retreating, panting horses, pushed over a rugged trail in a sweeping gallop, were held to the pace.

Dashing Charlie had ridden on ahead for some distance, and the captain and the aide were not far behind, the soldiers coming in a mass some hundred yards away.

The bugler had ridden up to the rear of Captain Arleigh, and thus they dashed up the hill, until suddenly the sounds up at the summit told the practiced ears of the scout that the end was near at hand.

At once he gave his wild war-cry, and they shouted back in the lull it caused:

"Let the bugler sound the charge, sir! It will tell that soldiers are near!"

"Ay, ay, scout!" cried Captain Arleigh.

He gave the order and the ringing notes of the bugle sent many an echo among the hills and rocks, and dismay to the hearts of the surprised savages.

The position held by the Indians was a bad one for them. Their horses were huddled together in a narrow valley, below the ridge that the soldiers were charging over as they came up the hill.

This put the Indians in close quarters, and below the soldiers, while they were dismounted, had dead and wounded to look after, and only about one-third of them were armed with rifles or revolvers.

Back to his men Captain Arleigh shouted his orders. They quickly formed in column of fours by companies, and then down upon the Indians, with a revolver in each hand and their reins in their teeth, Dashing Charlie in the lead, the mounted Boys in Blue rode—an irresistible avalanche of life and death.

And down the hill to join them rode the Gentleman Sport, Red Soldier and Dick Darling, now rescued from their danger.

The shock was tremendous and the Indians were driven into the narrow valley directly upon their ponies which began to stampede in alarm.

The rattle of revolvers was incessant, and the echoes among the rocks sounding a hundred-fold, with the cheers of the cavalry, the war-cries of the savages, the roar of trampling hoofs made it seem as though the valley was the outlet of Hades and hosts of damned spirits were breaking out of the regions infernal into the pure, cool air of earth once more.

Unable to withstand the shock the Indians had recoiled upon their ponies, fighting as best they could and shouting defiance, until the irresistible troopers forced them into a flight that soon became a perfect stampede on foot and horseback.

Through the mountain fastnesses fled the avenging band of savages, with that red night to remember against the pale-faces as another cause for vengeance.

It was not until miles had been gone over, and the revolvers had ceased to crack, as a fugitive was seen, that Captain Arleigh called to the bugler to sound the recall.

Worn-out men, many of them bearing arrow-wounds, or bruises, from a horse falling in the rugged trails, and animals dead beat, with panting sides, hanging head, and sweat-drenched skin, the gallant troopers obeyed the call and began to retrace their way.

Among the leaders had been Captain Arleigh himself and Lieutenant Gibbs, the latter slightly wounded, the horses of both officers bearing wounds.

A camp was formed, and the tired horses staked out, while the men began to look after the wounded and the dead.

Then came up the support under Captain Dunn, having hastened on to the conflict as the heavy firing told them that there was hot work going on up in the hills.

"You and your men rest, Arleigh, for I will push the pursuit with my cavalry."

"I would like to have Dashing Charlie though," said Captain Dunn.

Then men recalled the fact that Dashing Charlie had not been seen since the rush down into the canyon upon the red-skins.

Search was at once made for him, but no-

where could he be found, and neither was he discovered among the wounded or dead.

"I fear he was captured, sir, from all I can learn," said Captain Arleigh.

"Heaven help him if he has fallen into the hands of those defeated savages."

"I will push the pursuit hard, hoping to rescue him," and away Captain Dunn rode at the head of his men, while, tired and wounded as he was, Lieutenant Gibbs accompanied him in the hope of rescuing Dashing Charlie.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER THE COMBAT.

WHEN the fight was over and Captain Dunn and his troopers had gone on the pursuit, Captain Arleigh had time to look after his tired-out and cut-up command, for his losses in wounded had been great, both with men and horses, though few had been killed.

The camp was pitched in a pleasant place, and the first duty was to the wounded.

Grayson Gurney, the Gentleman Sport, and his guide and scout, Dick Darling, had been in the thickest of the fray, after the rescue party arrived, and they both devoted themselves to the care of the wounded, while Red Soldier, the Pawnee, had gone up to the hill-top to look after his horses captured from the outlaws.

Captain Arleigh had just sat down to write a dispatch to Colonel Buckner at the fort announcing the victory over the Indians, when Red Soldier put in an appearance.

"Ah, chief, I am glad to see you. It was a close call the Indians gave you that time."

"Heap close, captain; much good man come help us; might not hab scalp now, help no come."

"Yes; but you have Dashing Charlie to thank for it, as he came to the fort and reported that the Indians had you corraled with Mr. Gurney and Dick Darling."

"What is that you say, Captain Arleigh?" cried Grayson Gurney as he walked up to the quarters of the captain and heard his words to the Indian.

"Ah, Gurney, I have not had an opportunity to congratulate you before upon your escape."

"I was just telling Red Soldier here that it was a very close call."

"Nor have I had a chance to thank you, Arleigh, for saving our lives, for we owe it to your hard riding and pluck that we are now alive."

"You will always have my deepest gratitude, Captain Arleigh, for the service rendered me to night. It was the closest call of my life, I assure you."

"Yes, a few minutes' delay would have ended it, and in fact I believe the scout's war-cry checked the red-skins in the very moment of their success."

"It is true, for a half-minute's delay would have brought them among us; but do I understand you to say, Captain Arleigh, that we owe it to Dashing Charlie that you came to the rescue?"

"You do, indeed."

"How was that, may I ask?"

"Well, the scout was off trying to find Red Soldier here, who was lost."

"Me no lost. No lose red-skin in the woods," was the laconic response of the Pawnee.

"Well, you disappeared so mysteriously from the hospital, Red Soldier, that the scout went to look you up."

"Me have good time—heap good time—see!" and he held up his five scalps.

"I should think so, if scalping a foe is your idea of a good time, Red Soldier."

"But, where were you?"

"Me on trail, and catch bad pale-face coming back to his camp."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Big bad chief and four men."

"Ah, Muello, the Mexican, and his men, whom Lieutenant Gibbs sent on a false trail after Miss Buckner's gold?"

"That right."

"And where are they?"

"Happy Hunting Grounds."

"What, dead?"

"Here scalps—five—ugh!" and he held up the terrible trophies.

"By Jupiter, Red Soldier, but you are a dandy."

"He is, indeed, to have killed Muello, the Mexican, and his four men," said Grayson Gurney.

"How did you do it?"

The Indian related the circumstance of his adventure, and stated that he had the horses near, and how the weapons of the dead outlaws had helped the three of them out when the Comanches had them at bay.

The captain and the Gentleman Sport listened most attentively to the story of Red Soldier, and then the latter told how they had met the Pawnee with the horses and weapons of the outlaws, and that he had led them to the crater on the hilltop where they had made so brave a fight.

"Now me want go to fort with horses, then come back," remarked Red Soldier.

"You can go, chief, and bear this letter to Colonel Buckner, for I intended sending a courier with it."

"In it I will tell him that I can push on to-

morrow to where you left those dead outlaws, bury them, and satisfy myself that the Marauder chief is dead, and you can come back and guide me there, if you will."

"Me come mighty soon," was the answer of Red Soldier, and a short while after, armed with his letter to the colonel, and leading his captured horses, he set out for the fort.

"Now, Mr. Gurney, we will have a talk together," and Captain Arleigh turned to the Gentleman Sport.

"I wished to ask you, captain, how it was that Dashing Charlie is the one to whom we are indebted for our rescue?"

Captain Arleigh told of Dashing Charlie's discovery of them corraled, and his ride to the fort, as well as his having pushed the troopers hard in leading them back to their aid.

"Then I am under obligations for my life to Dashing Charlie, also. I will not forget it," said the Gentleman Sport with considerable feeling, and bidding the officer good-night he went to look up his guide, Dick Darling.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RED SKIN'S REPORT.

COLONEL BUCKNER and Beatrice had just finished breakfast, when it was announced that Red Soldier the Pawnee was coming toward the fort, a string of horses following him.

There had been considerable anxiety felt in the fort all night, for the alarm of Indians near, brought by Dashing Charlie, and the fact that a number of soldiers had gone out to give them battle was cause of dread of evil tidings in the way of the death of kindred and friends.

Then, too, there was anxiety to know if the corraled party, under the Gentleman Sport, had been rescued.

Grayson Gurney had many friends at the fort, and Dick Darling was popular among his comrades, while Red Soldier, the Pawnee, was a general favorite, and it was devoutly hoped that they would be rescued.

When, therefore, Red Soldier was descried coming toward the fort, all was anxiety to know just what had happened.

The Pawnee came on at a slow trot, unmindful of the impatience of all to have him hasten with all speed.

He was mounted upon one of the outlaws' horses, and the rest were in lead, each tied to the tail of the one in advance, and, with his pack-saddles and extra weapons, not to speak of his still untealed face in full war-paint, he presented a mingled picturesque and ludicrous appearance.

Into the stockade he rode, repeating, when addressed, his salutation, "How!" but answering no questions, for his destination was the colonel's quarters.

Colonel Buckner smiled as he saw the Indian, while Beatrice made some remark as to his odd appearance.

Dismounting, he gave his horses to a soldier to hold, while he advanced with a semi-military salute and held out his hand to the colonel and afterward to Beatrice, both of whom greeted him cordially.

"Sit there, Red Soldier, and rest yourself, for you look tired and as though suffering."

"Me all right, but me sit down."

"I am glad to see you back again, for we have all been most anxious about you, leaving as you did when not well enough to go."

"If Red Soldier say go, medicine-man tell him no, he no good to go on trail; so chief go without asking."

"And where did you go?"

"On war-trail—see!"

And he held up his bunch of fresh scalps in a way that made Beatrice shudder.

"Let me know all about it, chief, for you seem to have been in a close place."

"Heap close."

"Me tell all," and with this, in his quaint, laconic manner, the Indian told his story, the colonel and Beatrice listening with deepest attention, the former remarking:

"Well, Red Soldier, there is a Government reward of a thousand dollars upon the head of Muello, the Mexican, and three hundred upon each of his men, so your scalps there will bring you a very handsome sum in gold."

"Now tell me how it was you got corraled by the Comanches, along with Mr. Gurney and his guide?"

The colonel knew that the Indian had more important news—that, as he had come to the fort from the scene of action, he doubtless had a letter for him; but he knew well the way of red-skins, and did not hurry him, or show any impatience.

"Me tell heap yet!" was the response of the Indian, and then followed his story of his meeting with the Gentleman Sport and his guide, and how they had stood the Indians off until rescued, and he added:

"Soldiers just in time, or lose scalps."

Then he took out Captain Arleigh's letter, and said:

"Here talking paper for big chief. It tell heap more."

The colonel was most anxious to read the letter, but he took it in an almost indifferent way,

unheeding the quickly-uttered words of Beatrice:

"Oh, father, read it, please, at once, and let us know what has happened."

A grim smile passed over the face of Red Soldier at her curiosity, and he said:

"White flower woman—heap anxious."

Beatrice felt reproved, and her father laughed as he opened the letter and read aloud its contents as follows:

"I regret exceedingly to report, sir," it said, after giving an account of the rapid ride and rescue, "that Dashing Charlie disappeared in the charge into the canyon and has not been seen since."

"I had thorough search made for him, and looked for him among the dead and wounded, but nowhere can he be found, and we all fear that he has been captured by the Comanches."

"Captain Dunn is pursuing with his troopers, as my men and horses are used up."

"I am preparing to bury the dead, and will send the wounded to the fort at dawn."

"Then I will take a squad of men and ride on to the spot where the outlaws were killed by Red Soldier, who will report to you the affair and get full proof of the death of Muello, the Mexican, and his men."

After some talk over the affair, Red Soldier went to his quarters, and an hour after, mounted upon a fresh horse, set out to rejoin the command, having a letter to Captain Arleigh from the colonel.

"And Cousin Fred, wounded though he was, went on in pursuit of the Indians, hoping to rescue the brave scout," said Beatrice, thoughtfully, when she had heard all there was to learn from the front.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PRISONER.

THE anxiety at the fort was not appeased by the coming of Red Soldier, and learning what news he had to tell.

The soldiers under Captain Dunn were still in pursuit of the Indians, and it might be that they would meet and have to fight superior numbers.

Lieutenant Gibbs and others were reported wounded, a number were slain, and matters did look a little blue at the post, should the red-skins be found in large force.

Then, too, Dashing Charlie's fate was unknown, and all were aware of the torture he would suffer if he had been made a prisoner to his cruel foes.

To be upon the safe side, Colonel Buckner had sent two more guns, a troop of cavalry and four regiments of infantry toward the scene of battle, should it be shown that the Indians were in large force and would halt and attack their pursuers.

In his dispatch sent by Red Soldier, he had told Captain Arleigh to send a courier after Captain Dunn, telling him not to go too far into the Indian country, to move up with his men to Dunn's support, and that reinforcements should start at once to be within his call if needed.

The colonel seemed to reason well from past experience in fighting red-skins, that the party which had corraled the Gentleman Sport were sent for revenge and also as a decoy, hoping to draw the soldiers into a pursuit of them, and thus lead them into ambush.

Late in the afternoon two horsemen were seen approaching the fort, and as they drew nearer, they were discovered to be the Gentleman Sport and Dick Darling.

They were greeted with a cheer as they drew near the stockade, for Red Soldier had told of their gallant fight, and the Gentleman Sport at once went to Colonel Buckner's headquarters, sending his horse on by his scout to his cabin.

The Gentleman Sport was as cool as though he had not just escaped from death, and witnessed scenes of carnage and suffering, while he was as courtly as ever in his greeting to Colonel Buckner and Beatrice.

Seated with them upon the piazza when he approached, was Creola Gray, who had stopped on her way from school to her home, to ask if any news had been heard from the front.

In the time which the fair school-teacher had been at the fort, she had not seen the Gentleman Sport, though she had heard much of him. He had been absent most of the time on his hunting expeditions, and when he had returned to the fort it so happened that he had not met her.

Now as the colonel saw him approaching and called his name, she started as her eyes fell upon him. Her face at first turned deadly pale, and then flushed crimson.

It was evident that she had met him before, or his face recalled some memory of the past of a startling nature.

Neither the colonel nor Beatrice appeared to see her emotion, so engrossed were they in the approach of the Gentleman Sport, who must have news from the front of an important nature.

"I am glad to congratulate you, Mr. Gurney, upon your escape, for I have heard of it from Red Soldier the Pawnee. I trust you were not wounded," said the colonel in a kindly way.

"And I, too, offer my congratulations, Mr. Gurney, upon your rescue," Beatrice said.

"I thank you, colonel, and you, Miss Buckner, for your kind sympathy and congratula-

tions, and am happy to say that I received no injury to speak of," was the Gentleman Sport's response.

In spite of what he had passed through he certainly looked very handsome, and had the dashing, daring look of a man about him that could not fail to fascinate the eye of his own sex as well as command the admiration of women.

His attire at the fort was always faultless, though free and easy, and his hunting costumes very elegant, while at the little entertainments he attended, he always went in full-dress.

Now, though just off a long trail, he looked well, and his manners were as elegant as though in a ball room.

"Pardon me, Mr. Gurney, but I believe you and Miss Gray have not met before, as I observe you do not speak."

"Miss Gray, permit me to present Mr. Gurney," and the colonel marked how low was the bow of the fair teacher, though she did not utter a word, while Beatrice saw the man start, his face change color and his lips become compressed.

"Those two have met before, for he shows emotion, as she did awhile since," mused Beatrice, showing that the fact of Creola Gray's emotion had not escaped her keen eyes.

"No, I never met Mr. Gurney before, and I also offer my congratulations," said Creola Gray in a low voice.

The man simply bowed, making no reply to her, but turned somewhat quickly to the colonel and said:

"I have a verbal report to make to you, Colonel Buckner, from Captain Arleigh, sent by Captain Dunn."

"It is to the effect that the Indians he pursued would have led them into an ambush, but for a slip of paper found on the trail, and which was a line written and dropped by Dashing Charlie."

"Captain Arleigh, sir, has gone on to the support of Captain Dunn, and meeting Captain Dana, as reinforcements had been asked for, I told him of the situation, and he pushed on the more rapidly."

"That was right, Mr. Gurney, and I thank you; but that paper proves that Dashing Charlie is a prisoner to the Comanches," sadly said the colonel.

"It does, sir, as you will see," and he placed the slip of paper in the hands of Colonel Buckner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SLIP OF PAPER.

THE colonel took the slip of paper extended by Grayson Gurney, and a look of sadness crossed his fine face, for he knew all that it meant to be a prisoner in the hands of the Comanches, and that prisoner a man who was their most hated foe, Dashing Charlie.

There were tears too in the beautiful eyes of Beatrice, as she said:

"Poor Dashing Charlie!"

The paper was an envelope, which the scout had in some way managed to get out of his pocket and scribble on with a lead-pencil the following:

"Am in the hands of the Philistines, and wounded."

"Their conversation tells me they have a large supporting force, placed to lead the soldiers into ambush."

"Don't follow them. DASHING CHARLIE."

Such was the note of warning.

That it had been hastily penned and written under difficulties the cramped writing showed plainly.

Once written, an opportunity had been gained to drop it in the trail, the scout well knowing that the lynx-eyed men who followed the Indians would never pass that bit of paper unseen.

"Kit Kirby, the scout, found it, sir," explained the Gentleman Sport. "He gave it to Captain Dunn, who at once sent his scouts ahead and went slow to avoid an ambush, while he sent the note back by Lieutenant Vane, who was wounded, and asked Captain Arleigh to hasten on reinforcements, and he would locate the ambushed red-skins and give them battle."

"Captain Arleigh at once gave me the note, as I was coming to the fort, and asked me to fully explain the situation to you."

"I thank you, Mr. Gurney; but may I ask if Captain Arleigh went at once to Dunn's support?"

"He did, sir, with all of his force, excepting a few sent back to the fort with the wounded, and who are about an hour and a half behind me."

"Well, Dana is a pusher, and will quickly support Arleigh, who will not take long to reach Dunn, so the situation is not so bad after all; but I will still send three companies of infantry, mounting them, and another gun as reinforcements, for the red-skins must be in large force to be so bold."

"I will also send a warning to the different posts, mines and settlements."

"Orderly, say to the adjutant that I desire to see him, and order half a dozen couriers to re-

port at once to me ready for a long and hard ride."

The orderly disappeared quickly, and then the colonel continued:

"This news about poor Scout Emmett is sad indeed, for if he cannot be rescued, the worst of fates awaits him at the hands of his merciless captors."

"And I owe my life to the scout, sir, it seems, as he it was who brought the rescue party."

"Yes, Mr. Gurney, you do; and do you know I am surprised that you returned to the fort with such stirring scenes going on at the front? I only wish I was a soldier."

And Beatrice spoke up with considerable warmth.

The face of Grayson Gurney changed color at her words, while he responded:

"I am not a soldier, Miss Buckner, nor have I any ambition to be one. I came out to the frontier for sport and pleasure, and though not afraid to fight for my life, I have no desire to be killed uselessly, and I have yet to meet the man who would call me a coward or a shirk."

"Or the woman, Mr. Gurney?"

The question was put in a low tone, and to the surprise of both Colonel Buckner and Beatrice, came from Creola Gray.

The man started at the strange question, but quickly answered:

"Women, Miss Gray, often assume the prerogative of saying and doing that which a man cannot resent."

Seeing that the conversation was turning into a very personal one, the colonel hastened to say:

"I declare, Mr. Gurney, the ladies are rather hard upon men, anyhow. Now I appreciate your position fully. You are here from a love of adventure and sport, and you have faced a hundred dangers in pursuit of enjoyment which only the bravest of the brave would dare meet. But I am here as a soldier, to do my duty as such, and win by courage higher rank, and thus the difference between us."

"Yes, I so understand it, sir. When I was rescued by your gallant soldiers, Colonel Buckner, I joined in the attack of the Indians, and I believe your officers will say I was not a laggard in the fight."

"But, worn out from several weeks of hunting, and illness in camp, and as the Indians had fled, I came back to the fort, and, unless you need my services, sir, I shall not again take the field to become a target for Indian arrows."

"I think you are right, Mr. Gurney; and I think, too, that my daughter and Miss Gray did not understand the situation when they spoke," the colonel returned, hoping to soothe the ruffled tempers.

"I was merely thinking of Dashing Charlie, who went to the rescue of Mr. Gurney and his guide, now being a prisoner among the Indians," demurely said Beatrice.

"You think I should go to his rescue, then, Miss Buckner?"

"I did think so, sir, I confess."

"I left that duty in braver, better, and more skillful hands, for Lieutenant Fred Gibbs is at the front and will rescue the scout if it can be done."

"Now, permit me to say good-evening," and the Gentleman Sport took his departure, leaving behind him a certain feeling which Beatrice could not explain, even to herself, for she muttered:

"A brave man, yes, yet I cannot understand him. I will study him the harder, for I must—I will know who and what he is."

CHAPTER XIX.

A VOLUNTEER.

COLONEL BUCKNER had perfect confidence in his officers, and though it might be thought by some that he should take the field, he was not a man who, by doing so, would snatch credit from his subalterns.

If his soldiers were beaten back, and there had to be a still larger force sent against the Indians, it would be time enough for him to take command at the front in person.

So he contented himself by sending from the fort all that he could spare of soldiers, to be within call of Captain Dunn, whom he would be glad to inform, upon his return, that his commission had come promoting him to a majority, for "distinguished courage and ability in the field," the reference being made to his commanding in the fight with the Indians some time before, and which had been so represented by Colonel Buckner that the promotion promptly followed the recommendation.

"I am afraid you young ladies were too severe toward poor Gurney," the colonel remarked, after the departure of the Gentleman Sport.

"I think he is capable of taking care of himself, father, and I know, from all said of him, that he is a brave man; but I could not resist a cut at him for leaving the front in the face of the red-skins," Beatrice responded.

"Forgetting he was not a soldier and really had no business there?"

"Yes, sir, and I am sorry if I hurt him."

"And that is the Gentleman Sport, of whom

CHAPTER XX.

A SURPRISE FOR THE GENTLEMAN SPORT.

"MR. GURNEY, I frankly beg your pardon, for my unkind words of this afternoon to you," and Beatrice arose and held out her hand to the Gentleman Sport.

Both Colonel Buckner and Beatrice had been surprised at the offer made by the Gentleman Sport, and that it was a most praiseworthy one upon his part, and capable of being carried out, the commandant of the fort well knew.

The Government herds were at that time in a valley which ended in a canyon toward the Indian country, and some ten miles away from the fort.

They were guarded by the cowboys, some fifty in number, and who had their camp there.

Of course these gallant riders could make their way with their hardy horses, over the range and have but a comparatively short ride of it then to the rear of the Indians, and better fighters than they were not to be found upon the border, while they were armed with the best of weapons and were mounted upon speedy, enduring animals that could readily out-foot the mass of Indian ponies.

If they gained the rear of the red-skins they could force them to retreat, and by joining in an attack with them from the front, the soldiers could stampede the Indians without doubt.

In that stampede it would be the plan of the cowboys to attempt the rescue of the prisoners, Lieutenant Gibbs and Dashing Charlie.

This advantage had crossed the mind of Grayson Gurney when he heard the situation discussed among the officers, and he at once decided to act, so went to call upon the colonel.

He had several times given the cowboys a "blow-out," and once treated them all to a new sombrero, at another time presenting them with a pair of handsome spurs all round, so that the men were all devoted to him, and, with Colonel Buckner's permission, would be glad to follow his lead.

When Beatrice so frankly asked his pardon for her doubt of him before, he smiled pleasantly and replied:

"I have nothing to forgive, Miss Buckner, nor you anything to ask my pardon for."

"You simply took an idea that I was a soldier, and I took the position that, not being one, I had no right to interfere with an officer's prerogative any more than I have with a woman's."

"Now, however, the situation is different, for I know that Colonel Buckner has no mounted force to send to the rear of the Indians, and, not being an officer, I can lead those who are not soldiers, hence come with the request to be allowed to do so."

"And I do not only thank you, Mr. Gurney, but give you the desired permission, for I had overlooked wholly those gallant fellows who are many miles nearer the scene of battle than we are."

"When will you start, sir?"

"Within fifteen minutes, sir, for I sent word to Dick Darling, my scout, to have our horses ready, hoping you would accede to my wish."

"I will now bid you good-night, Miss Buckner."

And he was bowing himself out, when Beatrice again offered her hand with the remark:

"I wish you every success, sir."

"As I also do, Mr. Gurney."

And, with a grasp of the hand of each, the Gentleman Sport hastily departed from the room.

He passed the officers' club without stopping in, and was soon at his own cabin in the timber outside of the stockade-walls of the fort proper.

Dick was there awaiting him, with their best horses saddled and bridled, ready for the trail.

"Get a haversack of food, Dick, while I change my rig," ordered Grayson Gurney, and he hastily began to change his handsome suit for one suitable for roughing it in the saddle.

It did not take him very long, and he soon locked his cabin door and was ready.

"Which way to-night, captain?" asked Dick.

"You know where the Government herds of cattle are?"

"Yes, captain, and it's a long and ugly ride to make at night."

"It matters not; we are to go there, and wherever a horse can go rapidly, push along."

"Anything serious up that way, sir?" asked the guide.

"Well, yes."

"May I be curious and ask what it is, sir, for when you came to the barracks and called me, I was winning big money from those fool soldiers, and it was hard to pull myself away."

"You were wise to do so, however; but I do not mind telling you that we are on a rescuing expedition, for both Dashing Charlie and Lieutenant Fred Gibbs are in the hands of the red-skins."

"Then I would not bet a cent upon their rescue."

"I would, and I am going to rescue them."

"With what, sir?"

"The cowboys."

I have heard so much, and have not before met since my coming to the fort?" said Creola Gray, in a thoughtful manner.

"Yes, Miss Gray, and I fear you do not like him," the colonel added.

"I agreed with Miss Beatrice, and said what I did, for when I hear a man say no man can call him a coward, I always wonder how many women might justly make that charge against him with truth; but perhaps I should not have given vent to my thoughts by asking the question."

"You said his name was Gurney, sir?"

"Yes, Grayson Gurney?"

"I do not recall his name, but I have either seen him before somewhere, or he reminds me strikingly of some one whom I have met; but I am sorry if I was rude to your friend, Colonel Buckner."

"He can scarcely be called my friend, Miss Gray, for more than having met him quite often at the fort, and had him here to several receptions, I hardly know Mr. Gurney; but, from what I have seen of him, I think he is capable of holding his own pretty well, and rather enjoys a war of words with ladies, while I certainly have had proof that he is a brave man. Ah! something is being reported from the sentinel on the lookout."

The sentinel had discovered a body of men appearing over the distant ridge, and so reported to the officer of the day.

They proved to be the wounded men coming in, and having dispatched his couriers, gathered the force in the fort under fighting trim, put out his guards and scouts, Colonel Buckner felt that he was ready to grapple with any numbers the Indians could send on the war path.

There were several wounded officers who came in with the men, and these reported fully the loss in dead and wounded which the soldiers had met in the battle with the red-skins.

Later in the night a courier arrived with dispatches for the colonel. He read them with a clouded brow, and then said to his adopted daughter:

"Beatrice, I fear there are going to be hot times at the front, for Dunn was forced to retreat to a stronger position, notwithstanding that he was reinforced by Captain Arleigh, and in the sudden rush made by the Indians, when they saw that he would not walk into their ambush, poor Fred, it is feared, was captured."

"Cousin Fred! poor Cousin Fred!" mourned Beatrice, while the voice of the colonel had quivered as he told her the news from the front.

After a moment the colonel continued:

"Dunn fell back to a strong position, and is hurrying up his guns, and there will of course be a host in the fight."

"I do not fear for the result, though Dunn writes that there are all of a thousand Indians in his front, for we are bound to win when Dana's force reaches them."

"I do, however, wish that we had some force we could throw into the rear of the red-skins' position, for that would quickly start them upon the homeward trail, no matter how few the number who cut them off."

"Is there no force, sir, that you can send on a flank movement, such as you speak of?"

"Arleigh is the man, or poor Fred, for they have the dash to get there; but I could not take men from the red-skins' front as it would be known at once."

"Mr. Gurney to see you, sir, and he says that it is important, sir," announced the orderly.

"Ask Mr. Gurney to come in, orderly," was the answer.

And into the colonel's private parlor came the Gentleman Sport.

He was dressed in the height of fashion, and looked as calm as a May morning.

Bowing low to Beatrice, he saluted the colonel in a way that showed he at least knew how to do so, and said:

"You will pardon me, colonel, but I have heard at the Officers' Club, the situation at the front, and will you pardon me if I make a suggestion?"

"Certainly, Mr. Gurney. Be seated, sir."

"I merely wished to say, Colonel Buckner, that the situation is a grave one, in my humble opinion, especially as the Indians appear to hold Lieutenant Gibbs as well as Dashing Charlie captive."

"Such is the case, sir."

"Then my suggestion, which I ask pardon again for making, is that you send a force to the rear of the Indians to break their line."

"I was speaking upon that subject just when you came, Mr. Gurney, and it is just what I should like to do, only I have not the men."

"I had thought of that, sir, and desire to say that you have a most competent band of men in your herders, or cowboys, who are stationed some ten miles away from here in the mountains."

"These men have reason, I believe, to feel kindly toward me, and if you will allow me to do so, I will be glad to lead them upon this flank movement, and perhaps thus be able to recapture Lieutenant Gibbs and the scout in the stampede of the red-skins."

Dick Darling gave a low whistle, as indicative of his surprise, and then said warmly:

"Well, sir, if it can be done, they are the material to do it with, and you the one to lead them."

"So I believe," was the laconic reply, and the nature of the trail now causing them to ride in single file, Grayson Gurney dropped back behind the guide.

No better guide was then at the fort than Dick Darling, and he knew just when to ride rapidly or when to come down to a slow pace.

The distance to the valley, as has been said, was about ten miles, and the Gentleman Sport was anxious to reach there by midnight, get the cowboys aroused and in the saddle, so that they could cross the ridge and be in position in the rear of the Indians by morning.

He knew that the valley had steep sides, ended in a canyon, and at the entrance was narrow enough for a couple of men to keep the cattle from straying, while there was plenty of grass there to feed them for weeks.

At last the entrance to the valley was reached, and, as they rode in, a sharp challenge was heard to halt.

"Friends from the fort," answered the Gentleman Sport.

"Who are you?"

"The Gentleman Sport and Dick Darling. I wish to see your captain."

"Ah, Mr. Gurney, I know you now, sir; but Captain Dan is not here."

"Not here?"

"No, sir, he left four hours ago."

"But his men are?"

"Only two of us, sir."

"Great heavens! where is your herd?"

"Up the valley, sir."

"And Lariat Dan is gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"With his men, you say?"

"He took all but Zeke Lane and myself, sir."

"But he did not go to the fort, or we would have met him."

"No, sir; he went over the range."

"Hal and why?"

"Dashing Charlie came after him, sir," was the startling response of the cowboy to the Gentleman Sport.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CAPTIVE.

It will now be well to explain how Dashing Charlie got into the clutches of the Indians.

When the charge was made down the canyon, upon the red-skins, the scout was at the head of the column, with Captain Arleigh and Lieutenant Gibbs.

He had his own peculiar way of fighting, and he went at the red-skins with his terrible war-cry breaking from his lips at intervals, and a revolver in each hand, his reins, with a knot in them, caught over the horn of the saddle.

In the shock that followed the rush into the mass of red-skins, Dashing Charlie received a blow over the head with a tomahawk.

He reeled in his saddle, but did not fall, and though he had just power enough to still grasp his revolvers, he had no control over his movements or his horse.

On the animal dashed in mad flight, to break almost through the body of red-skins ere his rider was checked, or even recognized in the darkness and confusion as not an Indian.

Quicker than a flash then the Indians recognized the scout's helpless condition, and lariats were thrown over his shoulders, pinioning his arms to his sides, and he was a prisoner and securely bound.

A chief ordered two warriors to hasten on with him in the flight and to hold him, horse, weapons and all, just as he was, for the scout was really his captive.

Like distant thunder the noise of the trampling hoofs, cheers of the soldiers, clash of weapons, rattle of firearms and war-cries of the Indians, resounded in the ears of the scout, as he was hastened along with the flying red-skins in what was now a complete stampede.

The blood trickled from under his sombrero, from the gash in his head, and yet he seemed to feel no pain, appeared simply dazed by the blow, and how it was he managed to keep his saddle he could never afterward fully understand, for it was all, as he said, as though he were in a dream, a nightmare, and could not awaken.

At last his senses began to clear up, and he saw his captors upon either side of him, while ahead and behind were flying Indian horsemen.

He then realized that he was bound securely, and after awhile came to understand that he had felt a severe blow on the head, had known little else, and was now a prisoner to the Indians who were flying for their lives.

How long had he been thus dazed?

How many miles had the stampede covered?

These were questions he could not answer, and he began to feel the full horror of his situation.

He was well aware how he was hated by the Indians, and that they longed for his scalp. Now in their power, he would be put to death.

by slow and cruel torture, the worst that even Indian deviltry could originate.

To be retaken by the soldiers he knew was impossible, for though the Indians had suffered greatly, they were yet three to one against the soldiers.

Then, too, in besieging the Gentleman Sport, their ponies had had some hours' rest, and to graze, while the animals ridden by the troopers had been put to a speed over the rugged trail which had completely used them up.

There would be other soldiers come on, but they could not overtake the savages, especially those who had him in their power.

So the chance of escape looked very dubious to Dashing Charlie, and he began to see only death before him, and torment preceding it.

Riding along at a slow canter, his two Indian guards keeping close by his side, and with each a hand upon his bridle-rein, the scout did not show the slightest sign of reviving from his stunning blow.

He was too smart for that, being well aware that the Indians, when they captured him, knew that he was badly hurt by a blow, and incapable of resistance.

So he decided to still feign half-unconsciousness, and keep busy thinking.

His wound now pained him, giving him a violent headache, while he discovered that an Indian arrow had clipped his shoulder, though not injuring him other than slightly.

He conned over his chances of escape more and more, and at last came to the conclusion that if he was only mounted upon his splendid horse, Comanche, he would take the chance of making a dash for liberty.

"Comanche would, at a word from me, tear these two red-skins from their ponies, and fight his way through and away in the darkness.

"In fact, had I been mounted upon Comanche, I would not have been captured.

"As it is, I can really see no way now to get away."

Comanche, it will be recalled, had carried the scout upon his flying ride to give the alarm at the fort of the presence of the Indians, and that the Gentleman Sport, his guide and red-skin ally were at bay in the mountains.

The scout never had anything but good horses, and the one he rode was a splendid animal, but by no means the equal of Comanche, the roan stallion, while he had not the vicious nature of that animal toward all excepting his master.

Suddenly Dashing Charlie gave a start as he rode along which caused his Indian guards to turn quickly toward him.

The start was occasioned by suddenly having flash across his mind a plan of escape.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SCOUT'S WARNING.

THE Indians continued their flight through valley and over mountains, and that they were in a furious mood Dashing Charlie was certain, for he spoke their language fluently, and knew all that was said by them about him.

Often a pony was trotted to the front with a dead brave lashed to his back, and as the wounded also came to the front they soon formed a very respectable cavalcade as far as numbers went.

The unhurt warriors remained in the rear striving to check the advance of the troopers, but in vain.

At last Dashing Charlie realized that fresh troops had come up, that Captain Dunn with his horses not worn down was pushing the Indians harder and harder.

Still believing him dazed, or certain of their ability to hold him captive, the red-skins talked of affairs around him without hiding their plans in the least.

Several chiefs riding near Dashing Charlie began to hold a council as they rode along.

They had just come from the rear for a rest and talk, leaving others to take their places.

Reeling in his saddle his head drooped upon his breast, and acting as though his bound arms fast to the saddle-horn, alone prevented him from falling to the ground, Dashing Charlie listened attentively to all that the three chiefs said.

He soon picked up enough to know that the band he was with had been sent on a revenge expedition, to strike a sudden blow, escape and draw pursuit after them, which would be led into an ambush of a larger force already awaiting them.

The chief in charge had blundered by stopping to corral the Gentleman Sport party, and the expedition had been nipped in the bud by the soldiers surprising the red-skins while they were attacking the three men on the hill-top.

As the chief had been killed by Lieutenant Gibbs in the charge, he could not be held answerable for his blunder, but it was the province of the three remaining big chiefs to extricate the band from their peril and turn a defeat into victory by leading the soldiers into an ambush.

So word was sent by a brave, mounted upon the fleetest horse in the band, to tell the situation exactly to the chief there, and have the warriors ready to close in around the soldiers at a certain pass and annihilate them.

Word was also sent to the chief to forward a courier on to the village ordering more warriors to the front with all dispatch, so that the force would be strong enough, after wiping out the pursuing soldiers, to sweep on to the fort and surprise it with but few defenders there.

It was a well-laid plan, worthy of a military genius who did not have a red skin.

And Dashing Charlie heard it all and counter-plotted accordingly.

He must find some way to warn the soldiers pursuing of their danger.

He tried his bonds, and to his joy found that the noose was loose enough for him to slip his right hand through.

It was nearly daylight and what he did he must do quickly.

So he slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out an envelope and pencil.

These he concealed under his leg, between it and the saddle, and once more slipped his hand into the noose.

Dawn soon came and the Indians gazed curiously at him, and with expressions of delight at his capture.

He was moving along amid a mass of wounded warriors and ponies kept at the front, while a score or more of dead braves were strapped upon horses near him.

His two guards were about the only two unharmed braves in the lot.

In the rear a mile or more followed the mass of the band, fighting for their lives and contesting every foot of the trail, yet driven steadily along by Captain Dunn and his men.

Ahead was a plain and beyond a pass in the mountain.

Dashing Charlie's border knowledge told him that the Indians would make a stand there for rest and food, the soldiers camping at the stream in the valley to also rest and have breakfast, when once more they would push the red-skins to flight.

The halt was made, as he had anticipated, and his guards shook him to arouse him.

His face was all blood and his clothes stained, and he tried to look as wretched as possible, while he spoke only in a dazed way.

The Indians offered him food, but he would not eat nor drink, and so they left him seated upon his horse while they got their breakfast.

There was his chance, for he had managed to turn his horse with his head to the cliff.

Slipping his hand out of the noose, he got hold of his pencil and the paper, and wrote the lines which the reader heard the colonel read and which were given to him by the Gentleman Sport.

It was no easy work to do this, but he managed it, and, folding the paper, he held it in his hand which he again slipped back into the noose.

"As soon as Captain Dunn has rested and fed his horses and men he will charge the Indians, and when they stampede it will be my time to drop the note, which Heaven grant some keen-eyed scout will find," muttered Dashing Charlie.

That his prophecy was right was soon proven, for the troopers came with a rush toward the pass, the flight of the Indians beginning again as soon as they discovered that the troopers would ride over them.

Of course, Dashing Charlie dropped the paper, fraught with so much importance to the soldiers, and went on his way with the dead and wounded once more.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CAPTURED OFFICER.

IT was late in the afternoon, when the soldiers came up in columns, evidently intending to make an effort to sweep over the red-skins before they should reach the place of ambush.

The paper had been found, which Dashing Charlie had dropped, and thus warned the troopers intended making a sudden charge, hoping for good results.

But as they drew near the point of ambush the red-skins grew bolder, and they having a good position, made a determined stand against the charging Boys in Blue.

The stand made by the Indians convinced Scout Kit Kirby that they had either received reinforcements or knew that they were near, and he hastily explained his fears to Captain Dunn, suggesting that the charge be not made until it was known whether he was right or not in his surmise.

It was fortunate for the troopers that they did delay, and scattered to go into camp, for it gave the red-skins the idea that they would pursue no further, and so the ambushed force was hastened on, and just as Captain Dunn was thinking of ordering a charge, to the surprise of the soldiers the Indians anticipated their intention by making a dash from their place of retreat.

"They have been largely reinforced, sir."

"See!" cried Kit Kirby, and Captain Dunn hastily decided to meet the shock and then retire to better ground for defense a mile back, for the tables had suddenly been turned, the pursued having suddenly become the assailants.

The result was that the battle waged fierce and furious at close quarters for a short while,

when the red-skins were forced to retire in spite of their courage and superior numbers.

But had all their reinforcements been on hand the story would doubtless have been a different one to tell.

"They have more coming, sir, and the ridge back yonder is a better position to hold and cannot be flanked," said Kit Kirby, the acting chief of scouts.

"We will retreat there then," Captain Dunn said, bitterly regretting that he had not been able to make it a decided victory, even with Captain Arleigh's command, which had now come to support him.

A courier was at once dispatched to the fort asking for more men, and halting the guns and the troops coming at the ridge, so that they would not show themselves, and the Indians in their turn be given a surprise by hurling upon them a much larger force than they expected to find.

The wounded were also hastily gathered, along with the dead, and then for the first time it was discovered that Lieutenant Fred Gibbs, who, in spite of his wound, had been in the front of the fray all along, was missing.

There was his horse, shot dead under him, but the lieutenant was nowhere to be found.

"This is bad work, Arleigh," said Captain Dunn, when it was reported that alive or dead the handsome and daring *aide-de-camp* was not to be found.

The retreat to the ridge was then begun, amid the jeers of the red-skins, who threw a heavy line out to follow as far as they dared.

"It would have been worse had not Dashing Charlie brought the news to the fort that the Indians were near," answered Captain Arleigh.

"Yes, and now poor Dashing Charlie is a prisoner, Gibbs either in a like position or dead, Lieutenant Vane wounded, and over a score of our men either slain or put out of the fight."

"Yes, it is a bad day's work all around."

"And is not over yet," responded Captain Arleigh.

"No, but Dana is near, and over on the ridge we can give them a surprise, bringing our guns into action."

"Kit Kirby thinks they have more braves coming to the front."

"They doubtless have, from the bold front they put on, so far away from their village, too; but there is no dread about the result, only I would not lose Gibbs for his weight in gold."

"He was too reckless, I fear."

"Yes, he was working hard for another bar upon his epaulettes, and he has, in my opinion, won it many times."

"If the powers that be could only see how our young soldiers strive for promotion, they would be more willing to give them a lift, I think, and I am not speaking for myself, Arleigh, or for you, as we are the two youngest captains in the service."

"And you ought to have your majority for your fight of some weeks ago, and will get it for this one, I feel sure."

As the two officers were talking, riding side by side, Kit Kirby rode up quickly and said:

"Captain Dunn, turn your glass upon that group of Indians just leaving that clump of trees, sir."

Both of the captains leveled their glasses in an instant, and Captain Dunn, with something very like an oath, cried:

"They have Gibbs in their midst, Kit."

"Yes, sir."

The glasses revealed the young officer in the grasp of a dozen red-skins, who were half dragging, half pushing him to the rear.

Then a mounted brave came up to the group with a led horse, and the officer was at once placed upon the back of the animal and firmly secured there, after which the Indian horseman went off at a gallop toward the rear, followed by the hooting of the captors of the *aide-de-camp*.

"Poor Gibbs!" said Captain Dunn, with deep feeling.

"Yes, he had better be dead," was the response of Captain Arleigh.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SCOUT'S DOUBLE GAME.

THE idea that had made the scout, Dashing Charlie, start as the thought flashed through his mind of what he would do to escape from the Indians, was one that it would require boldness and coolness to carry through.

It had been discovered by him, by his capture of a counterfeiter some time before, who had been playing the part of his Double in the Valley Mines and at the fort, that this man, Lawrence Lennox, had once greatly befriended an Indian chief of the tribe that was then fighting the soldiers.

The counterfeiter, after his capture by Dashing Charlie, in a spirit of bravado, while at the fort, and before being sent East for trial, had made known to Dashing Charlie much of his past life.

He took delight in telling the scout how he had passed his counterfeit money off in the mines, and elsewhere, while pretending to be

Dashing Charlie himself, the resemblance between the two men, though accidental, for they were not kinsfolk, being most striking and remarkable.

Little dreaming that it might be of any use to Dashing Charlie, the counterfeiter had told him how he had once saved a captured chief from death at the hands of some miners, and afterward aided his escape.

The chief bore the name of Flying Elk, and had since become one of the great men of his tribe.

It was suddenly hearing the name of Flying Elk spoken, among the council of three chiefs, that had caused him to decide upon a plan of escape.

That plan, as the reader has doubtless surmised, was to play the Double of Lennox the Counterfeiter, claim not to be Dashing Charlie, but the friend of Flying Elk and seek his protection.

Fortunately the counterfeiter had told his story well, of how he had once visited the chief Flying Elk in his tepee, and through him had gained his protection from molestation from the Indians, while living in his mountain cabin with his confederate in crime.

The chief, who knew Dashing Charlie by sight, had first supposed his rescuer from the angry miners to be the scout, but afterward knew that it was not the case, and while hating one man loved the other as though he were a brother.

The counterfeiter further stated that he had given Flying Elk a pair of revolvers and a seal ring which the chief had taken a fancy to.

"It is a bold game, but I will play it."

"If that man Lennox deceived the miners and the soldiers at the fort as my Double, and I, in aiding Lieutenant Gibbs to escape, fooled the outlaws, then I can certainly hoodwink the Flying Elk, who, from all I can learn from the Indian, is in command of the force back in ambush."

"But did the counterfeiter speak the chief's language, or the Flying Elk speak English?"

"That I have got to find out, or all may go wrong."

So mused the scout as he rode along a captive, still assuming a half-dazed manner, though in truth he had by no means felt well, with his wounds, his cramped hands, hunger and want of rest.

When he saw the halt made at the pass he became most anxious, and, knowing that the soldiers were preparing to charge, he grew more and more worried.

But the soldiers did not charge, and then the scout saw reinforcements of red-skins rushed toward the front, and he dreaded the result would be a defeat of the Boys in Blue.

"Now to watch for Flying Elk," he muttered, as the Indians who had been in ambush came rushing to the front in numbers that alarmed the scout more and more for the safety of his comrades.

At the head of a large band of warriors rode a chief whom Dashing Charlie was sure must be the Flying Elk.

He was better mounted than were any of his braves, his costume and trappings were more gorgeous, and his face was painted a bright scarlet with black and white circles drawn around the eyes and mouth, giving him a most hideous and savage appearance.

The chief glanced at the bowed form of the scout and halted.

Then a call came for him from the front, and he dashed on, followed by his braves.

"That is the Flying Elk, for he seemed to recognize me," Dashing Charlie said, to himself.

Then he awaited breathlessly the battle which must follow.

He would have given much to warn the soldiers of what was going on, but he knew Captain Arleigh was an able Indian-fighter, Captain Dunn also, while Kit Kirby was a most skillful scout.

Yet with fear and trembling he waited the sounds of battle.

He had not long to wait, for soon came the yells of the red-skins, the cheers of the soldiers and rapid rattle of fire-arms.

Kept out of the fight as he was, a prisoner with death staring him in the face, his comrades engaged in a fierce grapple with overwhelming numbers of desperate warriors, and the fear that Flying Elk might be slain and his hope of playing the counterfeiter be thus thwarted, it seemed ages to Dashing Charlie that the battle lasted, though the fight was short, sharp and severe.

Then came to the rear wounded and dead warriors brought from the field, and the scout saw that the red-skins had suffered severely.

He also knew that they had failed to rush over or stampede the soldiers, and this cheered him greatly, though the talk of the red-skins told him that the Boys in Blue had retreated to a ridge in their rear.

Then the scout started as he saw an Indian horseman ride up, leading a pony, upon whose back Lieutenant Fred Gibbs was securely bound.

CHAPTER XXV.

FACE TO FACE.

THE scout felt a shudder pass over his frame as he beheld Lieutenant Gibbs, also a prisoner.

He forgot himself momentarily in commiseration, for the officer he regarded as affectionately as he would a brother.

For an instant he began to feel that he would make no effort to escape, unless it could be with Fred Gibbs.

Then it came to him that the best way to save the lieutenant would be to make his escape, reach the soldiers, guide them by trails which he alone knew, among those at the fort, to the rear of the red-skins and attempt to recapture the daring young aide.

But he must not be known to the officer, or recognized as Dashing Charlie.

He must in some way check the officer from a recognition of him.

As he drew near he saw that the officer had discovered him, but he bent over in his saddle and appeared not to notice him.

The guard having the lieutenant in charge halted near where Dashing Charlie sat upon his horse, with the two braves having him in keeping near.

Dashing Charlie saw that the uniform of the lieutenant was torn and blood-stained, while it was soiled with dirt as from a fall on the ground.

The face of the officer also was scratched, as though from coming in contact with the earth, and from one sleeve fell drops of blood from an arrow-wound in the arm.

Though his face was pale, it was not from fear, and his eyes were full of the fire of defiance.

"Hullo, Charlie, I am with you, and misery loves company."

Dashing Charlie made no reply, and the Indian brave with the officer struck his prisoner a severe blow in the mouth, cutting his lip.

But Fred Gibbs was powerless to strike back, and so remained quiet, for he knew to speak again would subject him to other indignities.

When the officer looked again at Dashing Charlie, he saw that something seemed to be wrong with him.

He could see that he had been wounded and badly used, but the scout did not look at him, or change from his bowed position.

"Poor fellow, he is hit bad, I fear," muttered Fred Gibbs.

The attention of the Indian guards was now taken up with the news brought in from the front by wounded warriors, and also the bringing in across the backs of ponies of dead braves.

Anxious to count the dead and wounded, Fred Gibbs began to do so as they were brought in, the hope in his heart that he would be able to report to Colonel Buckner the number he had seen, though he could not but admit that the chances were big odds against his ever being able to do so.

As he was thus counting them, he heard in a low whisper:

"Don't say I am Dashing Charlie, for I am playing a double game."

"I am the counterfeiter."

The officer started at the whispered words, and his heart gave a bound of joy.

Dashing Charlie was not as badly hurt as he had feared, and was on the alert for some plan of escape.

The escape of the scout would doubtless mean his own rescue, he felt sure.

So he nodded acquiescence with what the scout had said, and went on counting the dead and wounded Indians as they were brought in from the front.

As the Indians had now a large force between them and the soldiers, or rather between their dead and wounded and the Boys in Blue, they did not push the latter on toward their villages as rapidly as they had been doing.

In fact, they brought the ponies bearing the dead and wounded to a halt, for so many horses had been killed by the fire of the soldiers that they needed all that they could get hold of to present a bold front to their foes.

The prisoners were accordingly halted with the dead and wounded, the Indians feeling that their line would no longer be broken by an advance of the foe.

They had decided that Captain Dunn's force was all that they would have to encounter, and reinforcements would not arrive from the fort until the next day, if then, and night should tell the story of who would be the victors, for under the cover of darkness they intended to attack.

By nightfall a second body of braves would arrive, giving them, as they counted Captain Dunn's command, six to one against the soldiers, whom they regarded as hardly two hundred in number, while their ideas of the losses they had inflicted upon the troopers was that they had lost more than the Indians had.

Such was the situation when a large part of the Indian command came riding back to find a camping-place and good grazing for their ponies, there to await until nightfall.

With this command came the head chiefs, go-

ing back to hold a council, when they should go into camp.

The Indian chief riding at the head of the red horsemen, riveted the eyes of Dashing Charlie the moment he drew near.

It was the chief whom he had supposed was Flying Elk.

Behind him came, two and two, half a dozen other head chiefs, and the braves followed these, riding like soldiers eight abreast.

They made a very imposing and dangerous-looking lot of foes to fight, in their gaudy costumes and war-paint.

Dashing Charlie saw that the chief also had his eyes upon him, and glanced then toward the officer who was near him.

Nearer and nearer came the chief and his followers, and Dashing Charlie determined to act, and rousing himself from the half-dazed condition he had been feigning since his capture, he suddenly called out in the tongue of his foes:

"The great chief, Flying Elk, see how your braves have treated your pale-face brother."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FLYING ELK.

NOT even were the Indians more surprised at the sudden call of the scout, Dashing Charlie, to the great chief, Flying Elk, than was Lieutenant Fred Gibbs.

He was fairly startled at the sudden call of the scout, and forgot his own danger momentarily in wondering what would occur.

The Indians came to a sudden halt, and the chief addressed turned his gaze upon Dashing Charlie as he rode slowly toward him.

Dashing Charlie had made no mistake, for the warrior he addressed was indeed the Flying Elk!

The chief had been told that the great foe of his people, the White Scalper, as the Indians called Dashing Charlie, had been captured.

He had seen the scout before in battle, and had been near when he had rescued Beatrice Buckner from the outlaws and saved her from capture by the Indians.

He had noted then his striking resemblance to his pale-face pard, the counterfeiter, and had wondered much about it, until a renegade white man dwelling among the Indians had said the two were as much alike as twin brothers.

Now the chief advanced slowly toward the white man who had called him by name and called him brother as well.

"Who is it that speaks to the Flying Elk?"

"Who is it that has a pale face and calls the Flying Elk brother?" said the chief, in an impressive way.

"Has not the Flying Elk eyes to see that it is his white brother, has he not ears to hear the voice of his pale-face friend, or is his heart cold now where once it was warm?"

"My braves told me that they had taken prisoner the White Scalper, the great pale-face scout from the fort, the greatest foe of my people."

"Your braves have spoken with crooked tongues, for I was the prisoner of the pale-faces, my people, who captured me on the trail, and in the attack upon the red-men, the warriors of the mighty chief, Flying Elk, I sought to find safety by flying to them for protection."

"But they deemed me a foe, and I was wounded and knew no more for a long while."

"Does not the Flying Elk now know his white brother, Lawrence Lennox?"

It was evident that the chief was bewildered. He appeared in a quandary he knew not just how to extricate himself from.

The fact that the scout had been captured charging with the soldiers seemed to indicate that he was the foe of the red-skins.

He was anxious to welcome his friend, if friend he was, and so he said:

"Does not the pale-face chief here know that you are the White Scalper?"

"Ask him," said the scout, and in fair English, for he did not know that Lieutenant Gibbs spoke the Indian language well, the chief asked:

"Is this man not the White Scalper from the fort?"

"That man was captured on the trail and is a renegade to our people," was the prompt response of the lieutenant, who forgave himself the story he told under the circumstances, while he mentally resolved to rival Ananias and Sapphira in lying if it would do the scout or himself any good.

That he might aid the cause along, Dashing Charlie, before the chief could again speak, said:

"Has the Flying Elk forgotten that I saved him from death in the mining-camps?"

"Has he forgotten that I visited him in his tepee?"

"Does he not now carry in his belt the revolvers I gave him, and has he not upon his finger the ring I placed there?"

"No, no, I see that the Flying Elk no longer remembers his white brother, who was going to seek a home among the chief's people."

The Flying Elk now hesitated no longer, but rode quickly to the side of the scout, and with his own knife severed his bonds.

Then he grasped the hand of Dashing Charlie and wrung it warmly, while he said:

"My white brother still holds a place in the heart of the Flying Elk, and shall be welcome among my people."

"Come, let my medicine-men look to his wounds, for he looks ill and sorrowful."

"He is welcome, and let my warriors know that he is my friend, the Yellow Hair."

"Do my braves hear the words of the Flying Elk?"

The braves heard, but with evident regret, for they had believed they had captured the White Scalper, and suddenly discovered in their prisoner one who had befriended their chief, for all had heard of how the counterfeiter had saved the Flying Elk from death and afterward had been his friend.

They were very willing to welcome the white man as a renegade in their tribe, but they were greatly distressed that he had not turned out to be the White Scalper.

Disappointed in this regard they turned their baleful glances upon Lieutenant Gibbs, for he was in their power, wholly at their mercy for torture and death.

But Dashing Charlie was well aware that the red-skins would keep their prisoner until they reached their village, where all might witness his torture, and his fears for the safety of the officer for the present at least were allayed.

He might suffer abuse and pain, but he would not be bodily harmed to any great extent for the present.

CHAPTER XXVII.

UNDER COVER OF THE NIGHT.

ONCE Dashing Charlie, under his Indian name of Yellow Hair, had been admitted to the friendship of the great chief, Flying Elk, and welcomed by the other chiefs and braves of the band, he was placed under the charge of the medicine-man.

Though regretting also that the scout had not proven to be the White Scalper, the medicine-man did his level best in looking after the wounds of his pale-face patient.

He dressed them most skillfully, and seemed glad to hear the scout talk in his own language, for the medicine-man was not able to speak English.

Expressing a desire to "turn Indian," with much dispatch, Dashing Charlie had suggested the propriety of securing a head-dress and costume of some departed warrior that would fit him.

The accommodating medicine-man was not long in securing the necessary toilet, and, as it had been decided to send the wounded and dead on toward the village, the scout expressed a desire to remain, for he said, after a short rest he would be all right.

Flying Elk and his chiefs having ended their council, they came to him to glean what information they could obtain of the force of whites.

Dashing Charlie told them as far from the truth as he dared go, and led them to believe that in time he would lead them on an expedition the results of which would surprise them.

But the scout, as darkness came on, feigned illness and great suffering, and sought his blankets in a secluded spot.

He had been there but a short while when he hastily put on the Indian war-bonnet, threw his blanket over his shoulders, a la red-skin, and mounting his horse, rode quietly away.

His weapons had been returned to him by Flying Elk, so that once more he was fully armed and well mounted.

Several times he passed Indians as he rode along, but was not halted or spoken to, and having gained a distance beyond their lines, he said:

"Now, good horse, you have to be sacrificed, for the lieutenant must be saved, and it is over a dozen long miles to where I can get the aid I need."

"Go, sir, go! for all you are worth."

The rest he had gotten in the time after the capture of the scout, had refreshed the horse greatly, and he sprang away at a pace that was dangerous, considering the nature of the trail.

On, on, he went through the darkness, the scout taking big chances against a fall, until at last the pace began to tell upon the straining animal.

Then, though with reluctance, Dashing Charlie began to use the spur.

This increased the speed of the animal again, and reaching a ridge, the scout would spring to the ground and run alongside of his horse for awhile, though he was not really able to do so.

He had taken off his Indian blanket and head-dress as he rode, coming out again in his sombrero and scout's attire, for he was going where a red-skin garb might get him a shot.

On, on he went, the horse now failing, yet forced to struggle, until at last the top of a ridge was reached and the animal sunk in his tracks.

"Poor fellow, I feared I would have to kill you; but you have fallen in a good cause," and as the scout spoke he took off the saddle and bridle.

Then, with a farewell pat to the prostrated steed, he threw the saddle across his shoulder and began the descent of the ridge.

As he went along, a number of camp-fires far below caught his eyes, and he hastened his steps and in fifteen minutes after leaving his horse, was in a camp where were half a hundred men visible.

"Dashing Charlie!" broke from every lip as he appeared suddenly in their midst.

"Yes, pard, and you might as well be in the Rockies as here, for there is news that has not reached you, and I am here to ask you to follow me," cried Dashing Charlie.

"Ho, Charlie, what's up?" cried a tall, slender man, advancing and grasping his hand.

"Ah, Dan Donohoe, I am glad to see you, for I need you, and need you bad."

"Give the order to mount your best horses, and take every man you can spare, for you will need them, and why, I will tell you as we ride along."

"Take plenty of ammunition and provisions, for it's a hard ride, perhaps a long one, and sharp fighting against odds."

"Ho, pard, you hear what Dashing Charlie says, so get into your saddles at once, and two of you only I will leave to guard the cattle."

"And I must have a good horse, Dan, for I used mine up in coming here."

"I'll give you Black Bess, Charlie, and you know she is not far behind your roan," said Dan Donohoe, the cowboy captain.

"I could ask for no better horse, Captain Dan."

"Now can I get a bite and I'll be ready; but you had better take half a dozen extra horses along, for you may need them."

"I'll do it," and the order was given, while Dashing Charlie hastily ate an antelope-steak and drank a tin cup of coffee.

"All ready, pard?" cried Dan Donohoe just fifteen minutes after Dashing Charlie arrived in camp, and giving the order for the men to lead their horses up to the top of the steep ridge, the party of fifty cowboys started under the lead of Dashing Charlie upon an expedition yet unknown to them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COWBOYS ON THE TRAIL.

WHEN the summit of the hill was reached, the cowboys found the scout's horse, and he was dead.

"It's a big thing to make you ride hard enough to kill a horse, Dashing Charlie, for I know how you love them," Dan Donohoe said.

"You shall know what it is when we reach the valley and mount, for there we have a valley trail for some miles and can go in a gallop," assured Dashing Charlie.

When the valley was reached the men mounted, and as Dashing Charlie rode along by the side of the cowboy captain he said:

"Dan, the trouble is just this:

"Red Soldier slipped out of the hospital and disappeared, and I went on his trail, fearing he was out of his head."

"While on it, for I found he was roaring around on the war-path, I came upon an Indian trail and discovered Red Soldier, the Gentleman Sport and Dick Darling corralled by three hundred Indians."

"Whew! near the fort?"

"Just about fifteen miles away; but I rode to the fort and as I was on Comanche, got there in short time."

"I got Captain Arleigh, Lieutenant Gibbs and two troops to go to the rescue."

"Gibbs always goes."

"He's got more pluck than rightly belongs to one man."

"Poor fellow, he has need of it now."

"What?"

"He is a prisoner."

"That means he will die."

"Sure, if not rescued; but let me tell you that we rescued the corralled party, and a minute later in arriving would have been too late."

"In the charge I got in among the red-skins somehow—"

"Ah, I know how; it is a way you have."

"You just went in, that was all."

"Well, I went too far in, for I got a blow on the head that dazed me, though I kept my saddle and held on to my revolvers."

"When I did get my senses back again, I was bound to my saddle and a prisoner."

"I played the dazed dodge, looking for a chance in my favor, and as we went along, for the red-skins were upon a stampede, I found that they had a big force further back and were leading the soldiers into an ambush."

"Well, I managed to scribble a few lines and drop them, giving a warning, and I guess they were found, for the soldiers did not follow into the trap, and calling up their reserve then the Indians attacked."

"It was a hot fight and the soldiers had to retreat."

"There were too few of them."

"Oh, Captain Dunn had come up with a reserve and yet the Indians were too many for them."

"The deuce! then they are out in force."

"I should think so, for they have twelve hundred mounted warriors if they have one."

"And we knew nothing of all this!"

"Well, you know now, but you were far away from the scene, and I concluded I would hunt you up."

"But how did you get away?"

"I played my Double, for that counterfeiter while at the fort told me all about himself and how he had once saved Flying Elk the chief from being hanged by miners."

"He had sought a refuge among the Indians afterward, and so I played the counterfeiter."

"Dashing Charlie, you are a dandy."

"Thank you, if that is intended as a compliment."

"The best of 'em; but did it work?"

"It did, for I played the chief's long-lost pale-face brother, reminded him of the revolvers and ring I had given him, and he received me in great shape."

"I told him I was escaping from the whites, to seek his aid, when his braves bagged me."

"Good!"

"So I was set free, but meanwhile, in the fight, Lieutenant Fred Gibbs had been captured, and he was wounded and wretched-looking, but as game as a wolf."

"He greeted me in his off-hand way, but I pretended to be still dazed until I got a chance to tell him I was playing a game."

"And your game won?"

"Well, I am here, and I lit out as soon as it was dark and came for you, for the lieutenant has been sent on with the dead warriors and the wounded, and there are not a dozen fighting Indians in the lot, so we can head them off in Crescent Bend and rescue the officer, and cause more mourning in the Indian village."

"That is what we can do, Charlie."

"And then we can come back in the rear of the red-skins, and break up the combination against the soldiers."

"So we can, and now being posted, I'll pass the word back that we are going to rescue Lieutenant Gibbs, and my boys will ride and fight like fury, you bet."

"I know they will."

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT DEAD MAN'S PASS.

"I KNOW they will; that is why I came after you and your cowboys, Dan," repeated Dashing Charlie.

Word was passed back to the men that the Indians, over a thousand strong, were on the war-path, and Lieutenant Fred Gibbs was a prisoner in their hands and to be rescued.

The men did not cheer, but the gradual moving up from the rear showed that the cowboys knew what was expected of them, and were anxious to be at it.

The scout knew the trails so well that he was aware that when he had ridden fifteen miles to the cowboy camp, and would have to ride with the men twenty miles more to the place where he would head off the retreating party of wounded Indians, they would not have half the distance to go.

Had they gone in a straight line, they would have given him an all night's ride; but as they were compelled to follow a river-trail at the base of a range of hills, making a bend like a crescent, by hard riding the cowboys could reach Dead Man's Pass ahead of them, and thus give the place another claim to the name it bore.

"I rode to your camp in an hour, and within half an hour more we were upon the go."

"Now it will take us two hours to reach Dead Man's Pass, making, say, about four hours since I left the Indians' line."

"The wounded and dead outfit had orders to push on to the village, and they will travel about three miles an hour, so we will get there in good time."

"If not, and they have passed, we can hasten on after them," said Dan Donohoe.

"Yes, and will be thought to be their own people, coming as we will upon their trail," answered Dashing Charlie.

So they pushed on in a sweeping gallop, the scout following in the valley along the banks of a small stream, and crossing and recrossing several times where there was a rise and rugged traveling.

"Dead Man's Pass lies under yonder bluff, and from there the trail branches toward Valley Mines on the right, and on the left to the Indian village."

"We must head them off there, Charlie."

"I think we will, for it is not yet midnight, and I hardly think the Indians will push on rapidly, knowing that they have such a large force in their rear—Hark!"

All drew rein suddenly, and just as they had rounded a high bluff.

Then to their ears, wafted down the valley, came the distant boom of a heavy gun.

"Ah! the reds have attacked the soldiers, and they are hard at it."

"Listen to the heavy guns, and the rapid firing shows that the colonel has wisely sent a full battery to the front."

"Now to do our part."

And Dashing Charlie set off again, this time in a full run, for he said:

"The horses will have a rest at the pass."

In ten minutes more they were under the towering cliffs in the canyon dividing the range, and known as Dead Man's Pass.

It was a couple of hundred yards wide there, and in the canyon was a growth of pines which afforded good shelter, while beyond, around the cliff was meadowland bordered by a stream.

Here the horses were sent, while Dashing Charlie and Dan Donohoe went on foot to the trail to see if the Indian party had passed.

The scout had brought from his saddle-pocket a tiny dark lantern, and the rays were bent upon the trail.

A moment's search, and Dashing Charlie said, quickly:

"They have not gone by yet."

"We will walk up the trail and meet them."

"I am glad, for our tired horses will get a good rest."

Up the trail went the two men, proceeding with the greatest caution.

They had gone a mile, and to where the trail wound over a rise.

From here the trail stretched across a plain, and all was open for a mile or more.

It was starlight, yet dark, and the two men had to depend upon their ears rather than their eyes.

At last Dashing Charlie, who had thrown himself upon the ground, arose quickly and said:

"They are coming!"

"Good! but I hear no sound."

"You soon will, for they are traveling faster, as the sound of the heavy guns seems to have frightened them."

"At the pace they are now coming they would have been here before us."

"I hear them now."

"Yes; and we can go back and get the men ready."

"I am with you, Charlie."

The two parties now retraced their steps, walking rapidly, and soon after had told the cowboys the situation.

Then they returned to select positions in the pass, and told the men to follow slowly in about fifteen minutes.

By the time the cowboys left the meadow the horses had had a full hour's rest, grass and water, so were ready for the trail again, for all of them were hardy animals and soon recuperated from their rapid gallop of twenty miles.

The cowboys were divided, half under their captain, half under Dashing Charlie, and at a signal from the scout they were to dash out upon the red-skins, surrounding them, and being careful not to fire at random for fear of killing the man they had come to rescue.

CHAPTER XXX.

COWBOYS IN AMBUSH.

THE cowboys knew well what they had to do. Lieutenant Gibbs, a man fairly idolized by his soldiers, as well as all frontiersmen, was a prisoner to savages who would torture him to death by the most diabolical torments an Indian's mind could think of.

He was to be rescued, and the men were to be careful not to fire at random, as they might kill the one they sought to save.

The cowboys did not ask the numbers they were to meet.

Dan Donohoe's cowboys were not the kind who counted odds.

A dozen or a hundred to meet were all the same to them.

They were ready for the fray, and men and horses were on the alert.

Coming along the trail was the Indian outfit which had been sent to the rear.

Not a brave was thinking of danger in the front, for their village lay before them; but the heavy firing behind them told them that Flying Elk had not run over the soldier camp so readily as he had supposed, and that they were meeting more foes than they had anticipated finding.

It might mean defeat to the red skins with a hot pursuit, and so the warrior in charge of the party began to hasten his steps.

It was a strange command that he had under him.

First there rode a guard of three braves, each having a led horse, upon which was mounted a prisoner, for Lieutenant Gibbs and two soldiers had been captured.

These three pale faces were to afford no end of sport when they reached the villages of their captors.

The officer and the two soldiers, though wounded, were securely bound to their horses.

Behind them came two badly-wounded chiefs, one so hard hit that a warrior rode on the same horse with him to hold him in the saddle.

Next came the wounded braves, and there were warriors among them with shattered arms, broken legs, gashed heads and various flesh-wounds.

All who were able to retain their seats in the saddle rode alone, but the more seriously wounded had the support of a comrade, either on the horse with him or walking by his side.

The next squad was the most ghastly one of

the lot, for upon the backs of a number of ponies were two or more dead braves.

They were hung across the backs of the ponies, heads and feet down, and thus fastened on.

One large horse carried three bodies, many two, and very few had but one.

A herd of slightly-wounded horses came next, the Indians hoping to save them once they reached the village.

Bringing up the rear were a dozen braves, who were pretending to guard the rear, while they were really dodging work as supporters of the wounded.

Taken all together, the able-bodied and slightly-wounded red-skins outnumbered the cowboy band, for there were nearly a hundred live Indians along, showing that the soldiers had done very good work in their fight, while there was another battle-field to hear from.

The Indians were in a very sullen, ugly mood, for they had not accomplished their purpose, while, to make matters worse, the firing of many guns seemed to indicate that the soldiers were either holding their own in the struggle then going on, or perhaps driving their comrades from the field.

As they approached Dead Man's Pass the red-skins quickened still more their pace.

There may have been something in the remembrance that twice had that canyon drank the blood of their kindred in hot fights had there with soldiers, and once a great Indian battle had been fought in the canyon between rival tribes.

Then, too, a coach-load of passengers had been held up and massacred in the same spot by road-agents, until graves dotted the banks of the little stream by the hundred, and many bleached bones of human beings and horses were lying about here and there, visible even in the darkness.

But on the outfit of Indians hastened, anxious to get through the pass.

"I fear it's all up with us, lieutenant," said one of the soldiers in a disconsolate way.

"I never give up until the last, Hanson," was the plucky answer of the young aide de camp.

"I can cling to hope pretty well myself, sir, but I don't see any chance now," the other soldier remarked.

"Well, men, I hold the hope though I cannot tell you my reasons for it, that we may be rescued."

"Not after we go through Dead Man's Pass, sir, for no one ever gets back alive, once he passes that gate of Hades, it is said."

"I know, Hanson, that many a poor prisoner has gone through the pass never to return; but we are not yet through there and I wish to say to you both," here his voice dropped to a whisper, as he feared one of his guards might speak English:

"I wish to say to you both that you are to stand ready to do as I tell you."

"Oh, Lord! Lieutenant, you give us hope," cried Hanson.

"But you never despair, sir, the men say, and are always cheerful, no matter what happens, your old soldiers tell me," remarked the other man.

"I never say die until the funeral starts for the grave, Duggan, so keep up a stout heart both of you."

"I will, sir."

"So will I, sir; but I thought the red-skins had captured Dashing Charlie, sir."

"So it was said, but we have not seen him, sir," remarked Hanson.

"Sh! say no more," commanded the officer, and the men were silent, but each felt that the lieutenant knew more than they did of the situation, and their spirits arose with this belief.

A few moments more and the Indian column entered the deep shadows of the Dead Man's Pass.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE NIGHT COMBAT.

It may have been the impressiveness of the place, the graves about them, or a foreboding of evil, but whatever the cause, there was a silence fell upon the Indian column as they moved into Dead Man's Pass.

The wounded ceased their groans, the warriors no longer talked together, and only the hoof-falls could be heard.

Suddenly there came a wild, ringing, piercing cry, but too well known to the Indians.

It was the terrible war-cry of the White Scalper, and it sent a shudder through the heart of even the bravest warrior of the lot.

It was followed by a yell as fierce and savage as an Indian could give vent to, and it came in one wild chorus of half a hundred voices, which resounded with tenfold echoes, as the cowboys answered the signal of Dashing Charlie.

Then came a rush of many hoofs, and out of the dark pines, like phantom horsemen, came the cowboys, yelling fiercely but not firing a shot.

One party under Captain Dan went flying to cut off the Indians in the rear, the other under Dashing Charlie, threw themselves across the front of the column.

The Indians were taken completely by surprise and seemed almost paralyzed for the moment.

Then arose, in a voice like a bugle:

"Bravo, Dashing Charlie!"

"We prisoners head the column, so let the rear have it."

"Lieutenant Gibbs!" cried Dashing Charlie.

And in an instant he was alongside of the lieutenant, but not until he fired the first shot to open the fight in killing the brave who sought to strike down the prisoners.

He was just in time to save them, and for an instant it was Dashing Charlie in a hand-to-hand fight with three Indian guards.

But victory fell upon the scout, and in a minute of time the lieutenant and two soldiers were free, arms in their hands, and they were in the midst of the struggle.

In the darkness, broken only by the flashing of the revolvers, the wounded Indians could not be identified from those who were unhurt, and as well and wounded fought with like desperation, all suffered alike.

Having cut off escape from the rear, Dan Donohoe and his men were pushing the red-skins in a mass toward the center of the column, where Dashing Charlie and his followers were crowding those in their front.

At last the cry arose:

"Spare them, men, for they are at our mercy!"

It was Lieutenant Gibbs who made the demand, and he was seconded by Dashing Charlie, who called out, in the Indian tongue:

"Stop fighting, warriors, and your lives will be spared!"

Nearly all at once yielded to this command, though here and there a brave was too proud to surrender, and, continuing to resist, was shot down.

"Build several camp-fires, men, and we can see the situation exactly," ordered Lieutenant Gibbs, who at once took command.

This order was promptly obeyed, and in a few moments half a dozen camp-fires here and there brightly illumined the scene, lighting up the dark cavern like noonday.

"Dashing Charlie, I owe you my life, as do my two comrades here, owe you and these brave Cowboy Rangers."

"Thanks at such a time would be idle, for you know what we feel."

"Now to get back to the aid of the soldiers, for I fear they need all we can do for them," said Lieutenant Gibbs.

The men greeted his words with a cheer, and then turned to look after their dead and wounded.

Two cowboys were found to have been killed, and half a dozen more or less seriously wounded, while about half of the Indian band were wiped out.

"Now, Charlie, what do you and Dan say must be done with our own wounded and prisoners?" and Lieutenant Gibbs turned to the scout and the cowboy captain.

"What do you say, Charlie?" asked Dan.

"Well, we don't want the wounded and the dead, and the crippled horses, so let that outfit push on to their village."

"Well, Dashing Charlie, what about the Indian prisoners who are unhurt?"

"I'll tell you, lieutenant, that my idea is to double our force with them."

"How so?"

"That's just the idea, Charlie," cried Dan Donohoe.

"Well, sir, we can send the three of the cowboys who are slightly wounded, back on the trail we came, to their camp with the two dead boys and the two who are badly wounded, for there will be no danger to them in going that way."

"None," said Donohoe.

"Then we can take the best of the Indian horses, mount our men who have lost theirs, and the Indian prisoners who are able to ride, and start on the trail the crippled outfit came."

"With the Indians we will number about eighty, and the red-skin fighters back on the trail will think we are a pretty big force."

"They'll yell if they get shot for it, and give the snap away," said Dan Donohoe.

"How can they if they are gagged?"

"That's so, Charlie."

"Pards, set to work and chuck the mouths of the prisoners who are unhurt, and lose no time about it," called out the cowboy captain, and his men promptly obeyed, cutting sticks, wrapping them with strips of buckskin cut from the dead Indians' costumes, and forcing the gags thus made into the mouths of the prisoners, making them fast behind the neck.

The wounded cowboys were at once started back to their distant camp, the dead bodies of the two who had fallen being taken along for future burial.

Then the wounded and dead Indians on the crippled ponies were started toward the village of their tribe, after which the rescuers, forty-two cowboys, Lieutenant Gibbs and two soldiers, Dashing Charlie and twenty-seven Indian, seventy-three all told, set off on the back trail to aid the soldiers by a demonstration in the rear of Flying Elk's force.

CHAPTER XXXII.
OFF TO THE FRONT.

It was a very sore disappointment to Grayson Gurney, the man of leisure and riches, who had become so well known on the border as the Gentleman Sport, to find the cowboys not in the camp.

Whither they had gone he could not tell, and, by night, not even Dick Darling could hope to find their trail, so that to follow them would be useless.

What amazed the Gentleman Sport most was the fact that Dashing Charlie had come after them.

Now, he had left Dashing Charlie a prisoner in the hands of the Indians, and how on earth was it possible for him to make his escape and lead the cowboys off on a trail?

"If I didn't know that counterfeiter, Lawrence Lennox, had been sent East to prison, or the gallows, as it will more likely be, I would consider that he was again up to his tricks of playing the Double of Dashing Charlie, and that it was he who had led Dan Donohoe and his cowboys off on some trail, what, no one knows."

So said the Gentleman Sport to his guide as they rode back toward the fort, after a short rest in the cowboy camp.

The man on duty there and his comrade either would not or could not tell anything more about the cowboys' going, and so the Gentleman Sport saw nothing else to be done but to return to the fort.

It was after dawn when they reached their quarters, and, after getting breakfast, the Gentleman Sport went to report the situation to Colonel Buckner.

The colonel was at breakfast, but the visitor was invited in and asked to join them.

"Thank you, Colonel Buckner, but I have just breakfasted, and, having returned at dawn from my mission, I came to report to you, sir."

"The cowboys certainly did not refuse to go on the trail with you, Mr. Gurney?"

"No, sir; they had gone."

"Ah! that was just like Dan Donohoe, to try to be of some service."

"But it was not the cowboy captain, sir."

"Ah! who then?"

"The scout."

"What scout, Mr. Gurney?"

"Dashing Charlie, sir."

"What do you say, Mr. Gurney?"

"I say, sir, that Dashing Charlie went to the cowboys' camp some hours ahead of me, and led them off on some expedition."

"I do not understand this, Mr. Gurney."

"It was a surprise to me, sir."

"Dashing Charlie, you reported to me yourself, was a prisoner."

"True, sir, he was."

"And last night he went to the cowboy camp and led them off on some expedition?"

"He did, sir."

"I received dispatches last night by courier, from Captain Dunn, Mr. Gurney, and they reported that Lieutenant Gibbs and Dashing Charlie had surely been captured, while two soldiers of Arleigh's troop had also fallen into the hands of the Indians."

"Now I infer, from your report just made, that Dashing Charlie is free."

"It so seems, sir; but I have told you just what was made known to me by the two men who were all that were left to guard the herds."

"Did they say which way the cowboys went?"

"Over the mountain range, sir."

"Well, I only hope that Dashing Charlie has escaped, and if he has done so, then he went for the cowboys as the nearest and best force to use against the red-skins."

"How he could escape, though, from the hands of over a thousand desperate savages thirsting for his life, surpasseth my understanding."

"The scout is as cunning as he is brave, Colonel Buckner," suggested the Gentleman Sport.

"True, and it took remarkable cunning for him to get away, as well as truest courage."

"I could almost rather believe that his Double, the counterfeiter, had escaped from his guard and was back here again at his old tricks, and he had led the cowboys away under the belief that he was Dashing Charlie, rather than believe it possible for the scout to get away from those red fiends."

"I had thought of that, sir."

"Perhaps, father, the scout was not really captured, though the soldiers may have thought so," said Beatrice, now speaking for the first time.

"That may be possible, my child."

"But I thank you, Mr. Gurney, for having made the effort you did."

"I need no thanks, colonel, but I have a favor to ask of you?"

"Well, sir?"

"The loss of Lieutenant Gibbs leaves Captain Dunn without an aid, and I would like to be a volunteer for the position, with your kind consent, while my guide, Darling, can act as courier for the captain."

"Of course, sir, I ask for only a temporary

rank, that I may be of some service in the present troubles."

"I appreciate your kind offer, Mr. Gurney, and accept it."

"You shall bear orders with you to the front."

"When will you go?"

"At once, sir."

"That is prompt, and I will give you a letter to Captain Dunn, bearing his newly-arrived commission as major, and asking him to accept you as a volunteer *aide-de-camp* for the present campaign."

"Thank you, Colonel Buckner, and I will try and prove worthy of the honor done me."

"I will come by ready to depart for the front within a quarter of an hour," and the Gentleman Sport bowed himself out, while Colonel Buckner said:

"A strange man that, Beatrice."

"A very strange man, sir," was the low reply of the young girl.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP.

THE Gentleman Sport was not long in getting ready for the ride to the front.

He had ordered Dick Darling to have two of their best horses ready saddled, and another as a pack-animal, while the latter was to carry a very enticing lot of provisions for soldiers on a war-trail.

All was ready when he got back to his quarters, and mounting he set off with his guide, who had become more like his friend than one in his pay.

Halting at headquarters he got his letter from the colonel, with certain instructions, and the commission for Captain Dunn.

"You look like a man bent on war, Mr. Gurney," said the colonel, as he bade the Gentleman Sport farewell.

"I only hope the war will be over before I get there, colonel, for I am no warrior, though I deem it my duty to do all I can for those who came so bravely to my rescue," was the answer.

After passing out of the stockade gate Gurney set off at a canter, and as far as he could be seen, until he passed over the ridge, he was keeping up the same pace.

In two hours' time they had reached the scene where their lives had so nearly come to an end, and but for Dashing Charlie guiding the troopers to the rescue, would have done so.

"It was the closest call of our lives, I guess, Dick," he said to the guide, pointing to the hill-top.

"Yes, sir, it was."

"I don't care to take such chances again."

"Nor do I."

On they went, riding over territory now which had been fought over, a couple of hours more brought them to the scene where the Indians had made a temporary stand, and here they halted for rest and the noonday meal.

After an hour's halt they pressed on, and a ride of several miles brought them in sight of a courier riding toward the fort.

"Well, my man, what is the news at the front?" asked the Gentleman Sport, drawing rein as the courier approached.

"There was a hot, hard fight last night, sir, and it lasted until this morning, the Indians attacking our position."

"Then they fell back, and Captain Dunn has brought up all his reserves now and is pursuing them, for they will fight again from the dogged manner in which they retreat."

"Were our losses large?"

"I think we lost heavily, sir, and the red-skins got cut up very bad."

"Any news from Dashing Charlie?"

"No, sir."

"Or Lieutenant Gibbs?"

"No more than that the Indians still hold them prisoners, unless they have killed them."

"That is bad."

"Yes, sir, and they captured two soldiers yesterday, and four last night."

"I am sorry to hear this; but how far is Captain Dunn from here now?"

"About ten miles, sir; but I carry dispatches to Colonel Buckner so must hasten on," and the soldier saluted as he resumed his way.

"Report to Colonel Buckner that you met me within a few miles of Captain Dunn's force."

"Yes, Mr. Gurney," and the courier went on at a gallop.

The Gentleman Sport and Dick Darling also went on at a rapid pace, and a couple of hours more brought them in view of the ridge battle-field.

There they saw evidence of a fierce fight, for horses and broken accouterments strewed the field, while there was a row of newly-made graves.

Back in the timber a camp was visible, and here some thirty soldiers were seen.

Riding up to the camp the Gentleman Sport was greeted by a young surgeon who called out:

"Ho, Gurney, I have my hands full, for the red-skins fought us hard last night; but I have

buried the dead, and Captain Dunn sent a courier to the fort after ambulances, for I have some badly wounded men here."

"It is a pity."

"Yes, but are you going to the front?"

"I am, for it is a time when every man can help," and the two horsemen rode on without dismounting.

Half an hour later they came in view of the little army of Blue Coats camped on another ridge.

There was a battery of light artillery, five companies of cavalry and two of infantry, with a dozen scouts under Kit Kirby.

Captain Dunn was in command of the force, about four hundred men, and when Grayson Gurney rode up to his quarters Captains Dunn and Arleigh, with the commander of the battery were with him, holding a council of war.

Beyond, a mile away, standing like statues along a rise of ground, were a number of Indian sentinels, while Captain Dunn had set a line of guards, the rest of his men taking it easy and awaiting the command to advance and move against the Indians.

As they rode up to the captain's camp Grayson Gurney threw his rein to Dick Darling and dismounted, while he was greeted by the officers in a very cordial way.

"Ho, Gurney, glad to see you."

"Have you any news from the fort?"

"Yes, Captain Dunn, I left there after breakfast this morning."

"You have ridden hard."

"I was anxious to overtake you."

"Anything wrong?"

"Oh no, sir, I only came with a letter from Colonel Buckner, and to offer my services as an *aide-de-camp* to you for this campaign, for I have the commandant's permission to do so."

"Bravo for you, Gurney, and I accept your offer willingly, for I need a good *aide*, and you are that man."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GONE.

"HERE is the colonel's letter, Major Dunn, for I am happy to say I have the honor to be the first one to address you by your new title, for here is your commission as a major," and the Gentleman Sport handed over the coveted document to the astounded officer.

"Permit me to congratulate you, Major Dunn," said Gurney, and Captains Dana and Arleigh, with the artillery officer, promptly offered their congratulations.

"I told you so, Dunn, and you deserve it; but if we do not now whip the paint off those red devils, I'll move to reduce you to a lieutenant," said Captain Arleigh.

"I'll deserve it, if we do not whip them; but thanking you, gentlemen, for your kind congratulations, let me present my temporary *aide-de-camp* as— You said you were a Kentuckian, did you not, Gurney?"

"I have that honor, major."

"Then all Kentuckians who are not Governors and Judges are Colonels; so permit me, gentlemen, to present Colonel Gurney, my *aide*, and who is to be revered and obeyed as such."

"Ah, I rank my commander, it seems," said Gurney, with a smile.

"Oh no, yours is but a civil appointment; I am a *Regular*, you know," was the laughing reply, and Colonel Gurney received the congratulations of all present, while he said:

"See here, this rank is but for this campaign, mind you, for after that I am the plain Gentleman Sport; but if I am killed, put the title on my monument, for I know I shall have one."

"Now, Major Dunn, joking aside—have you heard aught of the prisoners, Lieutenant Fred Gibbs and Dashing Charlie?"

"Nothing; and I have had six soldiers captured besides."

"Then I have something of a strange nature to relate to you," said the Gentleman Sport.

And he told of his intention regarding Dan Donohoe and his cowboys, and how he had discovered that they had gone off under the lead of Dashing Charlie.

"I wonder if Dashing Charlie's Double can have escaped and be up to his old games again?"

"That is just what the colonel and I thought, Major Dunn."

"Well, he has not shown up here, and if this was last night, he has had more than time."

"It was a couple of hours after dark last night that he left with the cowboys," the Gentleman Sport said.

"It is now four in the afternoon, so he left over twenty hours ago, and in four could have reached us."

"What does it mean?"

No one present could solve the puzzle of the scout's strange conduct, and soon the conversation turned upon the situation as it was with them.

"I tell you, Gurney," said Major Dunn, "that our situation is a peculiar one."

"If I could catch those red-skins in an open prairie, I could cut them all to pieces in a short while; but here in the mountains every Indian is

With three soldiers, and they outnumber us nearly three to one instead.

"They boldly attacked our position last night, and but for the fact that Bronson handled his guns so well, they would have reached our line; but the 'wheel guns,' as they call the artillery, have great terrors for them.

"As it was, we had to fight them off until long after sunrise.

"Now, whether they have retreated and are leaving those sentinels there as a blind, I do not know; but I shall remain here in position tonight, awaiting another attack, and if it does not come, then it will prove positively that they have run off, and our horses being rested, and they hampered with their dead and wounded, we can pursue rapidly, and, catching them, I will attack them in position."

"It will be about the best that can be done; but cannot your scouts find out if the Indians have retreated, or are still there?"

"Unfortunately, just where they have halted, no.

"They cannot be flanked easily, for as far as Kit Kirby and his scouts have gone to the right and left their sentinels are on post."

"By advancing could you not find out?"

"Yes, and that would necessitate my giving up this position for a weaker one, should they be there and intend to attack to-night."

"Well, Major Dunn, I am here to aid you in any way you desire to command me, and my guide, Dick, will serve you as courier."

"You are most kind, Mr. Gurney, and will both be a strong acquisition to my staff, for I am short-handed now, and I know you and how good a man you are in danger."

"Thank you, major," was the answer, and soon after the council of war broke up, it having been decided that the plan of the major to await attack at night, and if none came, to push on, on the morrow, and attack the Indians at the best vantage ground for the soldiers, was the best thing that could be done.

For the soldiers to move upon the Indians in the position they then held, would cost far too many lives for the point to be gained and the glory.

So the day passed away, and night came, the soldiers appearing to be off their guard.

But the moment darkness fell, every man was on the alert, the sentinels were trebled on post, and the scouts went out ahead to reconnoiter and give the alarm if an advance occurred.

Thus the night passed away, and when the dawn came not a red-skin sentinel was in sight, for

"They had folded their tents like the Arabs, And silently stole away."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WRITING ON THE ROCKS.

THE general idea among the soldiers when they awoke and discovered the departure of the Indians, was that the latter had had all the fighting they wished, and had made a home run of it under cover of the darkness.

But it was well known that after their battle of the night before they must have suffered heavy losses, and hence be hampered in their retreat by many dead and wounded warriors, for it was ever their custom to remove their slain with those who suffered from wounds.

Under these circumstances a rapid march would overhaul them, Major Dunn thought, as did the others of the command.

Enough Indian ponies had been captured to mount half of the infantry, so that it could be turned on and off with the soldiers, thus enabling them to keep quite a brisk pace, and two of the guns and all of the caissons could remain with them and keep on to the support of the cavalry.

The latter were to take their best horses and men, and four guns, pushing ahead at a double-quick and hoping to bring the Indians to bay before nightfall.

Major Dunn left his hospital in the camp where it then was, and sent a courier back to the fort, asking for another company of cavalry and two of infantry, if the colonel dare strip the fort of them, and that, being fresh, they should march rapidly to his support, though they might not be needed.

The major was a skilled Indian-fighter, and he did not believe that the red-skins had wholly given up the fight, their retreat being only until they could get the troops further into their country and then with a large band of fresh warriors attack them.

Kit Kirby the scout was sent on ahead, and along with his men began to read the "signs" of the trail, as only a borderman can read them.

They sent back word that the red-skins had departed after nightfall, and had appeared to travel fast, but that the "signs" showed they were hampered by a large number of dead braves and wounded.

These, the trail showed, had gone on ahead, the able-bodied warriors following them when night came.

Thus miles were gone over and the troopers and the battery were making rapid time, the infantry force following more slowly.

Again Kit Kirby sent a scout back with information that the Indians had divided their

force, the wounded and half the number going one way, the other half on the left-hand trail.

These trails, the scout explained, did not come together until they met in the midst of the Indian country.

Not knowing what to do, or rather what Major Dunn would do, Kit Kirby halted his men to await the coming up of the command.

The chief of scouts himself went trailing about to see what he could discover, when his eyes fell upon a peculiar formation of some small stones upon the ground.

"That is strange.

"They are in the shape of a hand with the index finger pointing west toward that cliff."

"It is some Indian sign."

The more he looked at it the more he became convinced that the work was not that of an Indian.

There was the hand formed of stones, with the pointing finger, and it was well done.

"It is too well done for an Indian, and besides, the red-skins would have destroyed it when they passed, for it would never have escaped their eyes."

"I will see what that rocky finger is pointing at."

So saying Kit Kirby went in the direction indicated, climbed over some rough bowlders and found himself under a cliff of rock.

The surface was smooth and upon it was written with red clay, evidently, half a dozen lines.

The scout read the lines and gave a low whistle of surprise.

He read them again and then gave a call to his men, going to meet them as he did so.

They met in the trail and he said:

"Pards, look about for a sign which has a great deal in it."

"You have found it, Kit?" asked one.

"Yes."

The men set to work and it was but a very short while before the hand made of little rocks was found.

The men gathered about it and Kit Kirby asked:

"Is that Indian work, pards?"

"It hain't," said an old scout.

"Not a bit of it," another said.

"You bet no red-skin did that; but it means something."

"Yes, it means a great deal, pards."

"You knows, Kit?"

"Yes."

"Let us in with yer."

"Come with me," and Kit Kirby led the way over the bowlders to the cliff, and pointing to the writing on the rocks asked:

"Now, pards, what do you think of that?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SILENT WARNING.

THE group of scouts were standing about the cliff, discussing the writing upon the rocks, when Major Dunn rode up, halting the column at the spot where the two trails divided.

The scouts awaited his approach with Kit Kirby, who had gone to meet him.

"Well, Kirby, what have you discovered?" asked the major, pleasantly.

"I will show you, sir."

"Come, Mr. Gurney," called out the major, as he followed Kit Kirby to where the hand of rocks was visible.

"Here is something I ran upon, sir, and you see that it is well drawn."

"Yes, too well put together for Indian work."

"What does it mean?"

"I will let you read for yourself, Major Dunn," and Gurney having now come up, they climbed over the bowlders to where the group of scouts stood, still gazing at the writing on the rocks.

They fell back in respectful silence as the major and his volunteer staff officer approached, and then Kit Kirby said:

"I followed the direction of that pointing hand, Major Dunn, and there is the discovery I made."

"Ha! as mysterious as the writing on the wall," and then the major read aloud what was before him, written with a piece of soft red clay.

It was as follows:

"The Indians divide here to make you divide, or follow one trail."

"In either case they have an ambush awaiting you, one at the Point of Rocks, where there is a secret trail, allowing them to circle around and close in on your rear."

"The other ambush is at the Crooked Creek Cliffs, where you would have to fight a foe you could neither see nor get at."

"Take all your force by the trail to the Point of Rocks, and there look for signs to enable you to surprise the red-skins."

"Whichever course you pursue from here the Indians will know, for they are watching you, and the Crooked Creek force will reinforce those at the Point of Rocks, while another reserve will meet them there."

"You will need more men, so march slow and cautiously, and look out for signs before reaching Point of Rocks."

"There will be all of fifteen hundred braves in the fight there."

"Destroy this writing and the pointing hand."

"DASHING CHARLIE."

"Well?" and Major Dunn drew a long breath. "Dashing Charlie is a prisoner then?" said the Gentleman Sport.

"No, sir, for he could never have done this had he been," responded Kit Kirby.

"What do you make of it, Kirby?" asked Major Dunn.

"That Dashing Charlie is free, sir, and is watching every move of the Indians."

"Alone?"

"It is hard to tell, sir."

"Why did he not remain here and see me?"

"He might have missed a chance to do another good turn, sir."

"True, and this is a good turn."

"You will do as the silent warning directs, sir?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

"And I will go ahead slowly, sir, with my men, and keep our eyes open for warnings as well as for Indians."

"But how can Dashing Charlie know all this?" asked Grayson Gurney.

"It is a mystery to me, Gurney," the major said.

"And to me, sir, but the man who follows a warning given by Dashing Charlie will not go wrong."

"I agree with you, Kirby."

"There come Dana and Arleigh, and we will talk the matter over with them," and the major called to the two officers to advance.

They did so and were soon in possession of the facts as they stood.

"I bank on Dashing Charlie every time," Captain Arleigh said.

"How do you know that Dashing Charlie did this, for may it not have been done by some renegade white man among the red-skins?" asked Captain Dana.

This seemed to put a new view upon the case, and Major Dunn turned to see what Kit Kirby thought.

"It was done by the chief of scouts, sir, no other."

"Why are you so sure, Kirby?" asked Captain Dana.

"Well, sir, Dashing Charlie was captured by the Indians, that is certain."

"Yes."

"He has escaped, for Mr. Gurney says that he led Dan Donohoe's cowboys away from their camp."

"That is certain, too."

"Instead of returning to the command, as he would have done, could he not have been more useful away from it, he remained to shadow the Indians, and this is his work."

"It might have been done by a white renegade, though."

"It might have been, sir, but it was not, for if he escaped from the Indians, a renegade with them would naturally suppose he had at once rejoined the command."

"That looks reasonable, Dana," the major said.

"Reasonable, yes, but not convincing."

"Dashing Charlie is out, sir, and with Dan's cowboys, and he will be on hand to render good service when we least expect."

"Why he tells us to get more troops, and that we will have to fight fifteen hundred braves, at Point of Rocks, while the party at Crooked Creek Cliff will go to reinforce their comrades, and vice versa, as soon as it is known which trail we take, sir."

"I am convinced, Dana, and shall follow the advice of that silent warning," said Major Dunn, firmly, and that settled the matter at once.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FRESH SIGNS.

THE first thing that Major Dunn did, when he decided upon the course he would pursue, was to send two couriers back to the forces behind him.

One went to the other half of his command, with a letter to the commanding officer, and the other to the reinforcements he had asked for, and which he knew well the colonel would send to him.

These couriers were to hasten on those commands, at a steady pace, but not so as to break men and horses down.

The couriers sent were two of Kit Kirby's scouts, and they were to come back as guides to the commands, explaining all to the officers in charge.

From the rear command a courier was to be sent with a letter from Major Dunn, explaining the exact situation to Colonel Buckner, with the writing on the rocks and the course Major Dunn intended to pursue.

"Now, Kirby, lead on for the Point of Rocks, and we will have, when our reinforcements come up, five hundred good men to meet those fifteen hundred red-skins with and the advantage of a battery besides."

Kirby, having destroyed the writing on the cliff and the hand of rocks, at once went to the front with six men.

He gave them instructions to go on foot, as there was now no need of haste, and to stretch away on either flank, watching for every sign for and against them.

As for himself, he took the post of danger on the trail, with a scout following an eighth of a mile behind him.

The order then was for slow marching, and the command moved on the trail to the Point of Rocks.

It was toward evening when the towering peak known as the Point of Rocks came in sight.

The approach to the spot was over a ridge, then down through a wide open valley with precipitous sides.

The ridge, Kit Kirby saw at a glance was the very spot for a defense, should the force halt there, as the valley could be swept by the guns and the flanks protected by the infantry, while the cavalry could charge down upon the Indians.

The Point of Rocks jutted out from a spur of a range dividing the valley, and around one side the trail ran, and this the Indians had taken.

And right here the scout began to look for the "signs" which had been referred to by Dashing Charlie in the warning on the rocks.

He was not long in finding an arrow drawn on the ground and pointing toward the cliff.

Following the direction he came to the cliff, and in a crevice of the rocks was a stick, the end of which was split and held a piece of paper.

It was a letter addressed to Dashing Charlie, the same which he had used the envelope of on the trail when he was a prisoner.

Having no other paper, he had written across the writing of the letter with a lead-pencil what he had wished to make known, and it was to the point.

It read as follows:

"Before reaching the Point of Rocks, upon the left several hundred yards distant, is a thicket growing upon the side of the rugged steep.

"Penetrate the thicket and you will find a canyon through which, by the cutting down of some brush, and the moving of a few rocks, artillery can pass.

"It will bring you out into the trail leading to the right of the Point of Rocks, and a couple of miles beyond where the Indians are ambushed.

"They expect you by the trail and will be on the watch, so march past the Point of Rocks to a good camping-place for the night, build camp fires, and thus throw them off their guard.

"Then silently, with wheels muffled with blankets, make the flank movement by night, and you will be on time to attack the Indians just at dawn in their rear where they will have no protection.

"Open with artillery, and that will stampede their ponies, which are camped in the piles to the left, and they will dash away back over the trail toward the fort, while the red-skins will be cut off from their village and be left afoot.

"Their reinforcements from their tribe arrived to-day, and the band left at Crooked Creek Cliffs are now crossing to join them at Point of Rocks.

"You will have every man of fifteen hundred braves to fight, perhaps a couple of hundred more, but surprised and their ponies stampeded the result is assured.

"I will be near when needed, and I will not be alone.

"DASHING CHARLIE
Scout."

Kit Kirby read this lengthy communication without a word of comment until he had pondered it over awhile.

Then he said:

"That is as explicit as special orders at parade.

"I wonder what Captain Dana will say now, as to this not being Dashing Charlie who is writing this advice?

"He puts it mighty strong, too, just as pat as a general in command.

"But it is solid advice, and Major Dunn is just the man to follow it, for he understands that Charlie knows, even if it does place a herd of red cattle between himself and the fort.

"And he says he will be on hand when needed, and not be alone.

"Now he can't be moving about with Dan Donohoe's whole band of cowboys, that is certain.

"From all signs I see, I believe Dashing Charlie is in the Indian camps; but how, is the question.

"There comes the major now," and the head of the column was seen coming over the ridge into the open valley.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A FLANK MOVEMENT.

FEW men would have dared take the responsibility that Major Dunn was assuming.

He had gone out to rescue three men who were corraled, and to beat back a small force of red-skins.

He had pushed on, in spite of their reinforcements, asking for himself more men from the fort.

Twice he had given the red-skins a thrashing, meeting with one repulse, which was not, however, a defeat, for he retreated to a good position and held his ground.

Now he was far from the force, and determined to teach the Indians a lesson by crowding

them back into their own country, and alarming them for the safety of their own villages.

That he had big odds against him did not disturb the gallant major, for he was one of those soldiers who held that a compact mass of men well commanded, could not be stampeded or overrun.

His own fearless views were shared by his officers and men, who had every confidence in him.

When the major arrived at the Point of Rocks, he was some distance ahead of his command, which was marching slowly.

Kit Kirby's scouts had come in, but they had been sent out to scout around the Point of Rocks to drive off any lurking Indian that might be near.

The major discovered, as he rode up, that Kit Kirby had made some discovery of importance.

The scout met him with the letter of Dashing Charlie in his hand.

"Well, Kirby, something new?"

"Yes, major."

"You have struck a post-office out here, it seems?" and the major took the letter and read it carefully through.

"Well?" he said, as he finished it.

"It tells the story, sir."

"It does indeed, and shows that Captain Dana was wrong, for there is no way for a renegade to get this letter of Dashing Charlie's."

"Unless he was a prisoner and searched, sir."

"Ah!"

"But the writing is Charlie's, sir."

"You know it then?"

"Well, sir."

"Does any one else in the command know his writing?"

"Captain Arleigh does, sir."

"Why, there is no doubt of it in my mind, but here comes the command and I will ask Captain Dana what he thinks of this."

Not long after Captains Arleigh and Dana rode up together, and the major said, turning the letter so as to hide the name:

"Whose writing is this, Dana?"

"I should say Dashing Charlie's, for, though he can follow a trail straight, and shoot dead center, he wabbles badly when it comes to a pen."

"All great men write wretched hands," Captain Arleigh remarked.

"Just listen to this letter, gentlemen, and then give me your opinion, please!" and the major read the letter aloud.

"Well, I am no longer dubious," Captain Dana said.

"You think it is Dashing Charlie?"

"Yes, major, it can be no other."

"And you, Arleigh?"

"I never doubted its being the chief of scouts."

"What do you think about what he says we are to do?"

"He knows what he is about, and in following his advice one cannot go far wrong, I should say, Major Dunn."

"And I agree with Captain Dana, sir," added Captain Arleigh.

Other officers came up then, and they too agreed that it was the only thing to do, to follow the advice of Dashing Charlie.

So the major ordered the march on to the camp, spoken of in the letter, and Kit Kirby again led the way.

The camp was soon found, and it was a good one, with an abundance of grass and water, for the retreating Indians had not halted there.

The slow marching of the advance force, and the rapid marching of those in the rear, brought all the troops in before sunset, so that they would have an hour's rest before going on.

Camp-fires were built, supper was put on, and a number of men were set to work making blanket bands to wrap the wheels of the guns and caissons with.

Determined to go as quickly as possible, Major Dunn followed the advice of Kit Kirby, and had the men cut up the buffalo and bear robes they had along, to put upon the hoofs of the horses, for by cutting pieces the right size, and putting a string around them, they could be tied just above the hoofs.

When the robes gave out, buckskin was used, and for a few animals pieces of blanket.

The men were to walk and lead their horses, and the march was to be made as silently as possible.

Dummy sentinels, logs rigged with a coat and hat, were placed within the line of light, should any Indian scout be watching, and then, from the shadows where they had been encamped, the soldiers began to move by companies.

The cannon made only a dull sound in moving, and the hoof-falls of the horses were hardly heard.

The sabers, spurs, and all accouterments that would give out a sound were secured so as to be noiseless, and at last the whole command was upon the march through the darkness.

Saws were taken from the caissons and the saplings were sawed through, and men moved boulders that were in the way.

So the column found its way off the trail

through the thicket that hid the chasm which was a secret trail by which the Point of Rocks could be flanked.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON THE EVE OF BATTLE.

THE column of cavalry, artillery and infantry filing through the chasm looked like a huge serpent prowling for prey, so silently did it move along with muffled wheels and hoofs and the soldiers treading as lightly as possible.

Not a clash or jingle was heard, not a voice in command, only the dull thud of many feet, the muffled sound as if of far-distant thunder.

For miles they filed along, many of them feeling the peril of their situation, others wholly indifferent to what they had to meet.

All self-reliant and with every confidence in their leader.

Behind them they had left the blazing camp-fires, where all had looked strangely ruddy and inviting in their last look at it.

Soon for some of them there would be no more sunlight, for they would be sent into the darkness of eternity.

Soon for some of them there would be anguish-racked frames, and groans would break from the bravest of lips at the suffering to be endured.

But there was no shrinking, and had it been given men to see that they would never live to see another dawn, few, very few of them, would have deserted their post of duty that night.

There was a cruel foe to punish, and they would inflict the punishment with no quivering hand, no shirking heart, for how many of their brave comrades then lay in their graves upon the border, unknown and unhonored, shot down by an enemy to whom mercy was a stranger, to whom torture was a joy, when they could visit it upon a prisoner helpless in their hands.

Miles were passed over in this silent, slow march, until midnight had come and gone.

Large rocks weighing a ton had been moved aside by strong arms here and there, to give the space for the cannon to pass through, and in other places trees had been brought down with the saw alone, and lowered with lariats to avoid any crashing sound.

It was a bold brain that conceived that night-march, with all its difficulties.

But Dashing Charlie knew what his soldier comrades could do when put to it.

It was a bold man that felt that he could carry it out.

But Major Dunn knew all that he could do, and his men carry out.

At last the major came upon a group of men ahead, standing in the trail.

They were Kit Kirby and his men.

"We have reached the trail, sir."

"As Dashing Charlie said?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"We examined it with dark-lanterns, sir, and there are traces that *travois* have gone by, bearing wounded men, and a number of unshod ponies and men on foot."

"Then the Indians have not halted, to ambush us?" said Major Dunn in a disappointed tone.

"Oh, yes, sir, the able-bodied ones have, but the crippled outfit have gone on to the village."

"Ah! but are you sure all have not gone by?"

"Oh, no, sir, not over a hundred at furthest, for we examined the trail in several places, and where our lanterns would not show."

"Then we now go back on the trail?"

"Yes, sir, and I will leave two of my men on duty here, to hasten on to give us warning, should any force come up in our rear."

"Your scouts think of everything, Kirby."

"We have to, sir, where so much depends upon making even the slightest mistake."

"And now?"

"I will move on ahead, sir, and plan the ambush of the red-skins."

"And I will follow slowly?"

"Yes, sir, for I will send a man back in time to halt you, or lead you into position."

"Suppose you run into an ambush?"

"I shall guard against that sir, by going in Indian file, seven of us, each a hundred feet behind the other."

"A good idea."

"But the Indians will not be looking for a foe coming up in their rear, Major Dunn."

"You think not, Kirby?"

"No, sir, they will consider us a very mysterious enemy when we do hit them from behind, for I am sure that they do not know of that pass we came by, sir."

"But Dashing Charlie did."

"Scouts are always searching for a getting-out place, Major Dunn, and one peculiarity about the Indian is that he never takes retreat into consideration until he is whipped."

"They always expect victory, and did they not they would not be the brave men they are."

"I believe you are right, Kirby, and you have given me some thoughts well worth considering," said the major, frankly.

"Now, sir, I will leave two men here, for it would be better, and then start ahead to recon-

noiter, for our faces are now turned toward home."

With this Kit Kirby started ahead with his men, except the two left behind to report an enemy coming upon them from the rear.

He placed himself at the head, and had his men follow, as he had said, a hundred feet or so apart.

He had not gone but a couple of miles, when the narrow canyon they were passing through ended in a ridge, and beyond it was a broadening valley ending again in a narrow pass.

"There is where the Indians are ambushed."

"Yes, I see the glimmer of hidden campfires."

"They are in ambush, and believe we are back on the trail in camp."

"From this position we can wipe them out."

"Now to inform Major Dunn."

Back went the scout to meet the major, and half an hour after, and just two hours before dawn the soldiers were in position for the life-and-death struggle the day must usher in.

CHAPTER XL.

A BOLD RESOLVE.

It will be well now to return to Dashing Charlie, with Donohoe's cowboys.

When they moved back upon the trail, it was decided to go to the aid of the soldiers, the cowboys, with their Indian prisoners, endeavoring to present as large a force as possible.

But the firing ceased before they got near the scene of battle, and Dashing Charlie came to a halt.

"Lieutenant Gibbs, I have been thinking of a scheme, sir."

"Well, Dashing Charlie, out with it."

"It is to go back into the camps of the redskins."

"All of us, you mean?"

"No, sir."

"Charlie, are you tired of life?"

"Oh, no, sir, I am rather stuck on living."

"Well, you will be going back to your death."

"I don't think so, sir, for I am going as the side-pard of Chief Flying Elk."

"As the counterfeiter?"

"Yes, sir."

"But they have doubtless missed you ere this and will suspect you."

"Oh, no, sir, I'll simply say that I rode off with the crippled outfit, and then returned."

"I can reach the camps before dawn and seek a place to go to sleep, so they can believe I have been there all the while."

"And then?"

"Well, sir, there may be more prisoners to look after and rescue, and if the Indians still show such a bold front, I can be of service to the troops."

"Doubtless you can, but at a terrible risk."

"It does not strike me as being so, sir."

"I am no coward, Charlie Emmett, but it does strike me you are a fool," bluntly said Dan Donohoe.

Dashing Charlie laughed while Lieutenant Gibbs said:

"I think Dan has expressed my sentiments, Dashing Charlie."

"Now, lieutenant, from my standpoint, I see matters differently, and I believe the use I will be to the command justifies such risk as there may be."

"I will play the Double dodge, be Flying Elk's right bower, and play him to win."

"Now, I feel that I should do just as duty prompts me as it does in this case."

"I have such confidence in you, Charlie, that I will say no more."

"I know what you are too, Dashing Charlie, and I'll bet you to win against the field," added Dan Donohoe.

"Well, I'll make tracks for Flying Elk, and I have a little scheme for you to carry out, lieutenant, if you will pardon the suggestion."

"Out with it at once, Charlie, and if I can see daylight through it I am your man."

"Well, sir, over to the northwest here there is a mountain near Point of Rocks, and it rises like a beehive out of the range."

"I know it," said the officer.

"Yes, sir, we passed it together one while on a scout."

"That is it, sir, and I scouted about there once for months, and know the country well."

"There were no forts this far out then, and I was hunting the trails to rescue a pard whom the Indians had a prisoner."

"And you got him, too," said Dan Donohoe.

"Oh, yes; but in the valley is a stream not over girth deep, and which you can ride down without trouble, for it's pebble bottom all the way."

"Just after passing the Point of Rocks, on your left is a brook that flows into this larger stream, and that you can follow the water-bed of up into the mountain I speak of, for it rises in the range, and you need not go out of the current once, so will not leave a trail."

"Once up in those mountains you command a view of the valleys all around, and can see the Indians coming in retreat, or to reinforce their comrades, while on the other side it is not bad riding down to the valley."

"They can only retreat by the Point of Rocks, if pursued, as they will be, for if they come this way the cavalry and guns could slaughter them, it is so open, and they would have no place to make a stand in."

"The stream ahead of us is the one I speak of, and the place they will cross it is several miles below, so they will see no trail."

"Now, I will be with the Indians, and just look out for signals, for we will agree on some before we part."

"I am more than willing, Dashing Charlie, and I rather like your idea, for we can stand ready to help the troops in a time of need; but what are we to do with these Indian prisoners?"

"Keep them tied and gagged, of course, for if one of them escapes, the business will be all up for me, and perhaps for you all, should the troops not follow the retreating Indians."

"I'll see that not one of them escapes, for if they attempt it—well, a dead Injun is the only safe Injun, the only one to rely on," said Dan Donohoe, significantly.

"You understand now, lieutenant, how to reach the Bee Hive Mountain?"

"Yes; but how about grass up there?"

"There is plenty of it, sir, and water, too, while Dan has several days' rations along."

"Yes, and this is Lent for the Injuns, so they must live on light diet," muttered Dan.

"We mustn't starve them, Dan."

"No, lieutenant; but there is no need of giving them pound-cake and *et ceteras* when we have to live light."

"Well, Dashing Charlie, now let us agree upon signals between us."

And the three soon arranged what was necessary in that line.

Then Lieutenant Gibbs said:

"There is one thing that troubles me, and that is if one of the Indians sent on the trail to his village should return to his comrades and tell them what happened."

"Oh, that's all right, for it was Dashing Charlie did that, while in the Indian camp I am the Counterfeiter," said the scout, with a laugh.

Then the party rode on their way until they came to the shallow stream crossing the trail, and which Dashing Charlie had spoken of.

Here farewells were said, good wishes spoken, and the scout went upon his perilous expedition as a spy in the Indian ranks.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE RISK.

DASHING CHARLIE felt all the danger that he ran, in going back into the Indian lines.

But he was a man to take the boldest chances, and he felt that he would be able to be of great service to the soldiers.

Flying Elk had treated him as his friend the counterfeiter without a shadow of suspicion.

He had, it was true, some six or seven horses to account for, if his absence was discovered, but he could say that he was beyond the hills asleep.

There was one thing that worried him, and this was that he had not the horse he had ridden away from the Indian lines on.

To have it appear so, for he had neglected nothing, he had gotten one of the cowboys, who had a similar looking horse, to change with him.

This was the best he could do in that direction.

If any of his guards said they saw a difference, he would simply claim to Flying Elk that they disliked him because he was his friend, and so sought to find some cause of trouble with him.

Such was the situation as he rode back to the Indian camp.

He knew the country, fortunately for him, thoroughly, and so made a flank movement and came into the rear lines in an opposite direction from the one he had gone.

He had put on his Indian rig again, and was soon in a place not far from the one he had left, and not a moment too soon, for dawn was approaching.

He had passed Indian braves mounted and on foot, and no one had suspected him, or seemed to regard him particularly, not any of them suspecting a foe to be in their rear.

The difference between an Indian army in line of battle and a white one, the scout could not fail to comment upon to himself, for, where among the pale-faces there are often a number willing to find some excuse to go to the rear out of danger, with a red-skin all were anxious to be in the front of the battle.

Those whom duty sent to the rear were always sullen over the fact that they would not get the fame their envied comrades were enjoying.

Will not many an officer bear me out in this difference between what is called the soldiers of civilization and savagery, whether the savages be on the American frontier, in the wilds of Africa, or the jungles of India?

The savage is a fighter pure and simple, and seeks fame or death in the front line.

The white man, brave as most of them undoubtedly are, can point to many in their ranks

who play "old soldier" to avoid hardships and battles.

If I am wrong, it is but one man's opinion, yet one who has seen service under half a dozen different flags, and fought against the Indian, and other savage tribes as well.

With this digression, led into it by an old soldier's opinions forced upon the reader, I will go on to follow the fortunes of Dashing Charlie in his perilous undertaking in a cause he deemed his duty.

The Indians had been hurled back again and again, from their attempt to carry the ridge where Major Dunn and his soldiers stood at bay.

The attack had been made under cover of the darkness, and by numbers that the redskins felt were enough to rush over the lines facing them.

The Indians also hoped they would surprise their foes, who were not expecting an attack.

So they had crept upon foot nearly up to revolver-range, before they sprung forward on the charge.

The hail of iron and lead that met them, from the infantry and artillery, caused them to recoil like a wave hurled back from a rock.

But a charge on horses followed, and this was beaten back in like manner.

Then it became a scattering fire on both sides, with feints from pale-face and red-skin, until the morning dawned.

In spite of the peril of the act, the redskins had drawn off their dead and wounded, and when the dawn came they had a camp over the ridge with many a slain and bleeding brave in it.

Flying Elk felt his defeat keenly, and smarting under his losses, had determined to accomplish by cunning and treachery what he could not by brute strength.

So, before the dawn came, he placed his sentinels on commanding points out of range.

All of his dead and wounded who could be gotten possession of had been taken to the rear, and the line of fighting warriors had been placed out of sight beyond the rise, resting upon their arms and with their ponies near.

Thus the day came and found them, and it was the picture which Grayson Gurney, the Gentleman Sport, had looked upon from the other side, when he rode up to Major Dunn's headquarters.

Beyond the ridge sheltering the Indians the scene was a strange one, a sad one, grim and terrible too.

The warriors were as silent as statues, and their paint bedaubed faces were full of savage fury at their defeat.

They had started upon the trail of revenge, and for booty as well; and though they believed that they had inflicted worse punishment upon the pale-faces than they had suffered, yet they had not triumphed, they had gained no scalps, though a few prisoners had been taken.

And as the sun rose, Flying Elk went along his line viewing his tried braves, his dead and wounded, and thus came upon the scout, lying upon his blanket and serenely sleeping.

CHAPTER XLII.

PARDS.

THE Indian chief, Flying Elk, halted very suddenly when he beheld the sleeping scout.

He had quite forgotten his existence in the stirring events of the night.

Now he paused with an expression of real pleasure upon his face.

He had now some one who might be able to advise him as to what was best to be done.

His brother chiefs were almost discouraged by defeat, yet thirsting for revenge.

Now he could find an adviser in whom he could place every confidence.

So Flying Elk argued, and he ordered breakfast gotten ready for himself and his pale-face brother.

Then he dismounted and awoke the scout.

Dashing Charlie was evidently dreaming, for he sprang to his feet with a war-cry, and beheld Flying Elk by his side and somewhat startled by his sudden awaking.

"My brother has slept through the darkness."

"The sunlight is here now."

"Let us talk."

Dashing Charlie extended his hand and replied:

"The Yellow Hair was wounded and tired; but he has slept long and is refreshed."

"He is ready to accompany the Flying Elk where he wishes."

"The Flying Elk has a sick heart, for his people have fallen before the fire-guns of the pale-faces like the leaves from the trees when the winter winds strike them."

"The Flying Elk knows not what to do."

It was a great confession for an egotistical Indian to make; but he took very good care that those about him should not hear him.

"The Flying Elk must hold a brave heart, and we will talk over his sorrows."

"The pale-faces must be driven back, hundreds must die."

"Now not a brave has a fresh scalp of pale-face at his belt."

"That is too bad," said Dashing Charlie, con-

solingly, and added: "For the braves of the great chief Flying Elk."

"But we will talk over what is best to be done."

The chief seemed already elated, and led the way to the camp-fire where a young brave was preparing breakfast.

Dashing Charlie's provision bag was very generously supplied, and he took out his coffee-pot, fryingpan and some crackers and bacon.

Then he made some coffee, got out a bag of sugar, and broiled some venison steaks given him by the young warrior who was acting as cook for the chief.

The odor of the bacon broiling on the coals, and the fragrant coffee, floated on the air, and the chief was delighted at the prospect of a "white man's breakfast."

Dashing Charlie was cunning enough to invite the other great chiefs, too, cooking enough for all, and so a dozen gathered around the camp-fire.

Thus a week's provisions went in a very short time, and the scout concluded that the next meals should be shared only between the head chief and himself.

The young brave licked the fryingpan and swallowed the coffee grounds in his fondness for them, and then looked wistfully toward the provision-bag of the scout, a look which caused Dashing Charlie much anxiety, as he at once arose and strapped it firmly to his saddle.

Then he signified his desire to have a pow-wow with Flying Elk upon the subject nearest his heart, which was the raking in of pale-face scalps.

Their horses were staked out near, while the two walked to a clump of trees and sat down there alone, the other Indian chiefs being near to be called when wanted.

"Now let the Flying Elk open his heart to his pale-face brother, the Yellow Hair," said Dashing Charlie.

Thus urged the chief did tell his tale of woe, and frankly admitted that he was not able to extricate his band from the situation he then found himself in; but he had no idea of giving this away to his chiefs or braves.

Seeing his opportunity, Dashing Charlie offered advice which he hoped would prove all right for the soldiers, but death to the red-skins.

The scout's plan, by some reasoning of his own, was just what the chief would find it best to do.

Flying Elk was pleased with it, and begged that the scout would say nothing about its being his idea, implying that the chief himself was the military genius that had originated it.

The other chiefs were then called, and Flying Elk made known his views which were cleverly kidnapped from Dashing Charlie.

They were to the effect that the dead and crippled should start at once for the village, taking the trail by way of the Point of Rocks.

The able-bodied Indians and ponies should remain in camp all day, and during the night take the same trail as that taken by the crippled brigade.

This would give the soldiers the idea the next morning that the Indians had fled, and they would follow.

Then the chief knew the very place, suggested by Dashing Charlie, where their white foes would walk into the ambush and be utterly wiped out.

The chiefs gazed upon Flying Elk with admiration, and applauded his plan as the very best thing that could be done.

And so it was carried out, up to the going into ambush, and waiting for the game to walk into the trap set for them.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DASHING CHARLIE'S COUNTERPLOT.

HAVING planned so well for Fighting Elk and his braves to ambush the soldiers and get scalps galore, Dashing Charlie felt that his duty was then to counterplot to upset his calculations.

So he set to work to get what news he could from the chief, without attracting attention to his wishes.

He found out that there had been more braves sent for, to join the red-skins at the front, for Flying Elk was only anxious to draw the pale-faces into a trap from which there would be no escape for them.

Dashing Charlie kept close to his pretended red brother, and was as kind as he could be to all of those with whom he came in contact.

His long life among the Indians had taught him well their superstitions and weaknesses, and he pretended to have a power that was supernatural.

He would ride apart from the Indians, cover his head with his blanket, and soon come to them with some story he had concocted, and in their favor.

He told them much of no importance, about the pale-faces, and yet which the red-skins looked on as words of wisdom.

When they halted for a midnight rest, he said to himself, after delivering a speech to some thirty of the leading warriors:

"I am catching on in great shape, and if they

do not catch me at some trickery, all will go well."

He tried this head-hiding game several times on the march, and always with some new story of what he had discovered with closed eyes of what the pale-faces would do.

At last he came to the point of his counterplot.

He said to the Chief Flying Elk, in a weird, dramatic sort of way:

"The Yellow Hair saw as though in a dream, a high pinnacle of rocks."

"He heard a voice calling in his ears, for him to go there alone and climb, and climb, and when he looked toward the pale-faces in the glare of sunlight, he would see their hearts, and would see what was best for his red brethren to do."

"He heard the voice say that the red-men were all to pass on, but the great Chief Flying Elk was to halt in the stream beyond this high tower of rocks."

"The Flying Elk was to keep his horse in the stream, while he folded his head with his blanket and waited for the coming of the Yellow Hair."

"What the Flying Elk would see in the darkness of his blanket it would be right for him to do."

"If all remained darkness, if he saw nothing, then his pale-face brother the Yellow Hair would have the vision from the towering rocks."

"If others gazed upon either of them there would be no vision to the eyes of the one who was under the look of another eye."

"Does the great Chief Flying Elk understand?"

The great chief did understand and so expressed himself.

He was more than willing to enter upon any plan that would be for the benefit of himself and his people, and he had the utmost confidence in his brother the Yellow Hair.

So he quickly arranged that the Indians should march in close rank and go on to the place of ambush, there to encamp in the valley.

He, the chief, meanwhile, would drop to the rear with the scout and go through the movements the Yellow Hair had planned for both of them.

So Flying Elk called his chiefs about him, and told them that he had a vision of what was best.

He told them to call in all their braves to close order of marching, scouts and all, and go on to the place of ambush, passing it to where their horses could be corralled, and coming back to take up position for the surprise and battle.

He told the chiefs that they must appear to have gone on, from their trail, so that if there were scouts ahead of the soldiers, they would keep following the trail, not to be molested, and the troops were thus to march into the very jaws of death.

The cunning chief put all this down as his own plan, and the chiefs were to obey promptly and fully.

It struck each chief of a band of braves that the plan was excellent, and they hastened to obey.

In the meanwhile Flying Elk fell back to the rear with his inseparable pard, Dashing Charlie, and the Point of Rocks was reached about dawn.

Then Yellow Hair, as the scout was known to the Indians, in a weird kind of way, placed the chief in position in the brook.

He knew well his desperate peril if caught in the act of writing a letter and hiding it, but he would not falter.

Having drawn an arrow on the ground pointing to the letter, he climbed to a position where he could see the top of the Bee Hive Mountain, and at once began to wave about his head his red Indian blanket.

Almost immediately it was answered from the summit of the Bee Hive, and for half an hour there was certain signaling between the scout and Lieutenant Gibbs on the hilltop.

As though understanding the signals he saw, and satisfied that his own were rightly interpreted, the scout quickly descended, mounted his horse, and was about to ride on to join the chief when he beheld an Indian within a few feet of him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HELD AT BAY.

THE scout was never in his life more taken aback than at the position he found himself in.

He had just mounted his horse, and he had the reins in one hand, his rifle across his shoulder held by the other.

It would take quick work to change to a hostile attitude.

Especially would it with an arrow fitted to a bow, the bow drawn back to its full tension, and the shaft pointing directly at his heart and not twenty feet distant.

The Indian, too, was sheltered by a rock behind which he stood, from his shoulders down.

At a glance the scout recognized the Indian. He was next in command to Flying Elk, and was envious of his younger rival for fame and worship.

He was known as Fighting Fox and he de-

served the name as a fighter and because he possessed the cunning of a fox.

He was the only chief who had not appeared to fancy the scout coming into the tribe, and Dashing Charlie had heard him say that Flying Elk was wrong in taking a pale-face into their midst.

Now the scout saw all.

The Fighting Fox, commanding no separate band of warriors, but next to Flying Elk in power, had dropped back when he saw the chief and Yellow Hair doing so.

He had taken up a position where he could see the chief enter the stream on his horse and remain there.

Then he had hunted cover and saw the scout do the writing on the rocks.

He also saw him ascend the rocks and signal, though he could not, from down in the valley, see the answering signals.

He had not time to go after help, and his voice would only reach the Chief Flying Elk, who would hasten on to the braves, not back on the trail alone.

So alone the Fighting Fox intended to capture the man who had already proven a renegade to his red brothers.

So he sought a hiding-place near the scout's horse, and there awaited his return.

He had a revolver, but the arrow was a silent weapon of death, and he preferred it.

So it was he arose before the scout like an apparition, and covered him with his arrow.

He did not wish to kill the scout.

That would not do, for he would miss seeing him die by torture.

Then, too, Flying Elk would say he did not like him, and had killed him from malice.

To capture him alive would be the proper caper, for then he could bring the chiefs back to see the writing on the rocks, the pointing hand, and send a band of braves to the top of the mountain to see who had been there for the scout to signal to.

This proof would soon make the chiefs see that Fighting Fox was the man to be their chief, and not the Flying Elk.

There was a fiendish expression of joy upon the face of the chief as Dashing Charlie caught his malignant eyes fixed upon him.

But the scout did not even change color or move a muscle.

He saw his position, that he was trapped, and he dared not fire a weapon then, should he risk the arrow from the chief's bow.

Strategy must be his guardian angel to help him out of the difficulty.

He knew that the Fighting Fox had seen all he had done, and so he said eagerly:

"The Yellow Hair is glad to see the Fighting Fox, for he is a great chief, and he wishes to show him the signs he has made on the rocks for the Great Spirit to read, for it is a prayer from my red brothers."

"He wishes to show the great chief, Fighting Fox, where the Yellow Hair climbed the rocks and waved his blanket in the air as a signal to attract the eyes of the Great Spirit, that he might behold the pointing finger, and read the red-man's prayer."

"The Flying Elk does not understand as does the great Fighting Fox, that the Great Spirit must be with the red-men in battle, or they will lose."

"Will the Fighting Fox come with his brother, the Yellow Hair?"

It would have been a very difficult task to have found another Indian in the whole tribe who would not have been deceived and won over by the clever words of the scout.

But envy, hatred and malice, with ambitious hopes to destroy his rival and rule his people, hardened the heart of Fighting Fox to the very cunningly put words of Dashing Charlie.

He would not believe that the scout was not a traitor, and so he answered:

"The pale-face chief is a snake in the grass."

"The Yellow Hair must yield, or the Fighting Fox will kill him."

Dashing Charlie saw that all was up with him unless he could get the mastery in some way.

So his quick brain tried another plan.

"The Fighting Fox speaks with a crooked tongue, and he is a fool."

"See! there comes the Flying Elk, and he will tell him the same."

Dashing Charlie had not seen the Flying Elk.

His plan was to make the chief turn his head and then send a bullet into his brain, endeavoring to excuse the shot to the head chief as best he could, saying that he had dropped his rifle and it had exploded.

But right there is where Fighting Fox proved himself worthy of his name.

He was too cunning to be caught in a trap.

CHAPTER XLV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

WHEN Dashing Charlie sprung his little story upon the Fighting Fox that the Flying Elk was coming and would be a good one to appeal to, his hopes fell as he saw that the chief did not turn his head.

An expression upon the face of the Indian said very plainly, though he did not open his lips:

"I am too antique a bird to be caught by chaff instead of wheat."

Seeing that his plot had failed, Dashing Charlie quickly tried another.

He moved his head from side to side, looked attentively, as though trying to make something out, and said:

"No, it is not the Flying Elk that is coming, but Cunning Cat, the friend of the Fighting Fox."

Here was another, but it didn't work.

If Cunning Cat, the boon companion of Fighting Fox, was coming, let him come along.

About such was what the chief thought, but he did not look to see.

Observing that this failed, Dashing Charlie had to spring another trap upon the red-skin.

He was getting desperate.

So he still kept up his earnest looking, and suddenly cried in alarm:

"No! no! See! see! it is not the Cunning Cat, but the Red Soldier! the Pawnee chief who is the friend of the pale-faces."

"Quick! let the Fighting Fox defend his life."

Again Dashing Charlie was foiled.

The plucky Indian did not move, did not change a muscle, and his voice was cool as he said:

"The Fighting Fox does not fear the foe at his back, but the renegade Yellow Hair before his face."

In spite of the situation, Dashing Charlie laughed.

"You're a dandy, Fox the Fighter, and no mistake—an honor to your tribe," he said, in his free and easy sort of manner.

A malicious grin crossed the face of the Indian as he replied:

"The Yellow Hair speaks with a crooked tongue, and is a fool."

"I believe I am, just at this particular moment of my existence, Foxey, and you are right to shoot my own words into me as you do; but come, I am getting cross-eyed trying to watch your hands and that arrow at the same time."

"Let us talk."

The chief shook his head.

"No pow-wow? Well, how are we going to get at the bottom facts of this case?"

The chief again shook his head.

"Will my red brother not speak to me?"

"No red brother of bad pale-face."

"Ah! you go back on your kinsfolk, do you?"

"Well, will not the gentleman from the back country of squaws and papposes talk the question over?"

"Yes."

"Good! Will the Fighting Fox let me talk?"

"No, Yellow Hair talk with a crooked tongue."

"Bad man!" said Fighting Fox, with a look of disgust at the evil company he found himself in.

"Well, just at this writing it seems that Fighting Fox, Esquire, is the Bad Man from Bitter Creek, for you have got me as close as a pig under a gate, but I am living in hopes that I may soon be the gate and you the pig."

The chief did not understand this figurative way of speaking, but said sternly:

"The Yellow Hair must die."

"Let him drop his rifle!"

"It might go off and shoot the Fighting Fox in the back."

"No, drop fire gun!" was the determined response of the Fighting Fox, and he moved his arrow, still pointed at the heart of the scout, in a threatening way, as though he was growing impatient.

Now just here was the chance of the scout, as he saw it.

He would hand over the rifle to the Indian, and when he took it he would have to let go his arrow to do so, and in that single second he would draw a revolver and fire.

It was all he needed, just one little second of time.

The shot would give an alarm, but it would be better than losing his life.

He dared not go back among the Indians and play the white brother act again.

"I will give my rifle to the great Fighting Fox, and I will go with him to his people, for they and the Flying Elk will see that the Yellow Hair is their friend, and not a renegade."

"No, Fighting Fox says Yellow Hair must drop rifle."

"Fighting Fox will not touch it."

"You suspicious old catamount, you are more cunning than a basket of kittens."

"I'd shoot you with pleasure if I only knew how to do it."

"But sure as shooting, Dashing Charlie, you have got your foot into it this time and no mistake."

"I say, Foxey."

"Drop rifle, or Fighting Fox let arrow go."

Dashing Charlie saw there was no doubt but that the Indian meant just what he said.

He would forego the pleasure of seeing him die by torture rather than take any chances of his escape, or being killed himself.

So he said, still keeping up his bantering way:

"If you say so, Foxey, of course," and he let go the rifle and it fell to the ground.

"Yellow Hair hold hands up high!"

"Lord! but you've been a road-agent in your time, Foxey."

But just as Dashing Charlie was about to obey, there came a whizzing sound and an arrow buried itself in the throat of the Indian chief.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A FATAL SHOT AT LONG RANGE.

IF Fighting Fox had time to be surprised, by the burying of the arrow into his throat, between the act and his death, he was not certainly more amazed than was Dashing Charlie.

For an instant the scout was wholly non-plused.

But only for an instant, for the natural instinct of the man caused him to drop from his saddle and seek the cover of the rocks.

From this point of vantage he looked about him, his rifle, which he had regained, once more ready for use.

His first desire was to find the one who fired that fatal shot.

Was it the Chief Flying Elk, who had seen his danger, and not knowing the cause of Fighting Fox for covering him with his bow and arrow, had come to his rescue?

It certainly must be the Flying Elk, thought the scout.

But as he looked over the rock he saw the arrow sticking upward.

It was still in the throat of the Indian he knew, though he could only see but half of it.

He looked attentively at the shaft and said half-aloud:

"No, it was not the Fighting Elk."

"That is not an arrow made by any of his tribe."

"It is red and feathered with black feathers."

"There is no need of my hunting cover, for I know who fired that shot."

"It was the Pawnee."

The scout had just uttered the words when he saw a form step out from cover a hundred yards away.

It was Red Soldier the Pawnee.

He was on foot, and advanced rapidly toward the scout, holding out his hand as he drew near. Dashing Charlie grasped the outstretched hand warmly and said:

"Red Soldier, I owe you one, and I hope some day to pay up."

"You are a friend in need, and no man ever made a better shot."

"Long way off. Heap good shot."

"Big chief dead."

"Red Soldier get scalp now."

"You bet you are entitled to it, and you had better get his traps, too, for you speak their lingo well and may play one of them by night."

"But don't delay, Red Soldier, for their head chief is not far off, and over a thousand braves within three miles."

"Me kill big chief."

"Oh no, for I am playing his Highness now to win my little game."

"Me see Charlie with big chief, but too far off to kill."

"I am glad of it."

"Me know where braves are."

"Good! I had an idea you would be nosing around somewhere."

"A red-skin educated by pale-faces makes a great combination, and no mistake."

Red Soldier seemed pleased with the compliment, and while he scalped Fighting Fox and took off his rig, Dashing Charlie talked to him.

"Now that is about the gamest piece of Indian meat I ever saw, Red Soldier, and it is a pity to see him lose his hair; but then, you know your business, and I have nothing to say."

"You picked him off at the longest range I ever knew an arrow to kill, and it was a dead-center shot in the throat."

"Now let me tell you my little game."

The scout hastily told the Indian just what had occurred to him, and what he had done and intended to do.

He made known the fact that he was playing the part of Flying Elk's friend, and that he had plotted to surprise the red-skins where they had expected to surprise the soldiers.

"Now, Red Soldier, there is just this I wish you to do for me."

"Me hear."

"You know the Bee Hive Mountain?"

"Me know."

"Upon its top Lieutenant Gibbs and Dan Donohoe's cowboys are."

"Good white chief, Fred."

"Yes, Lieutenant Gibbs is a team all by himself."

"Dan good man, too."

"You bet."

"Cowboys good."

"Like Red Soldier heap."

"Yes, and they have with them some thirty Indian prisoners."

"Me kill and scalp them heap quick."

"No, you don't, for there is no reward offered

for scalps now, and the retail business is good enough for scalps at present.

"You are to go to Bee Hive Mountain."

"Yes."

"See Lieutenant Gibbs and tell him all that I have done."

"All right."

"Tell him how you saved me from the chief here, and what I wrote on the rocks, as I told you."

"Me hear."

"Then tell him to go from Bee Hive across to Black Mountain, you being his guide."

"Me know."

"To-night at Black Mountain will camp an Indian outfit, of many dead braves and wounded ones."

"Heap scalps."

"There will be some forty able-bodied Indians along, too, and two wounded ponies slightly hurt."

"Me see all go."

"I'll be bound you saw them all, Red Soldier, for you have been on the watch."

"Bet you," was the laconic response.

"Tell Lieutenant Gibbs also that there are with the party six soldiers who are prisoners."

"Me see them."

"Now don't forget, Red Soldier."

"No."

"When they have hit the camp tell them to come back on their trail, and to look out for stampeded Indians."

"Yes, me know."

"Now good-by, Red Soldier, and I expect to see you later with a whole string of scalps."

"Me have heap plenty."

"Good-by, Charlie," and the Indian started off on his mission greatly elated at what had happened.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE TRAP SET.

THE scout watched the departure of the Pawnee until he was out of sight.

He had told him nothing about a horse that the chief Fighting Fox had ridden, for not seeing him, he supposed that the red-skin had dropped back on foot to watch his rival and himself.

But the Pawnee had not only seen the horse of the Fighting Fox, but had captured him and had him secreted in a thicket, awaiting the return of the rider.

It was while there watching he had seen the scout ride into the trap set for him by Fighting Fox.

He had at once begun to make his way toward them, and occupied as both were with the situation, neither saw the Pawnee.

He had thus gotten as near as he dared go, and so risked the shot he did at long range, and which went so true to the mark.

When he saw the Pawnee in the distance riding off on the spotted pony of Fighting Elk, Dashing Charlie said:

"That Indian beats all I ever struck in my trails through life."

"If he'd only come into a civilized community they'd send him to Congress."

"Now, what is to be done with Foxey?"

"I'll give him a swim, I guess, dropping him into the drink."

With this he took up the dead body of the chief and carried it over to the swiftly-flowing stream dashing around the Point of Rocks.

"It's all the burial I have time to give you now, Foxey, for time is precious."

"You are not a sailor, but a grave in the drink goes all the same."

With this he launched the body into the stream, and watched it as it went swiftly away upon the current.

"Now, to destroy any tell-tale marks," he said, as he went back and effaced the red stains where the chief had fallen.

"I guess Flying Elk has smothered by this time, for he has had a long wait of it."

"Only a red-skin could stand it."

Mounting his horse he rode away up the valley toward where he had left the head chief.

There sat the Flying Elk upon his horse in the middle of the stream, his head and body all enveloped in his blanket.

"Ho, Flying Elk, the Yellow Hair is here," called out the scout as he drew near.

The blanket was removed in an instant and the scout could hardly refrain from laughter when he saw the sweat and paint-begrimed face.

The sweat had simply streaked the face downward, the white paint and black paint mingling.

But the chief was dignified as ever, and after greeting the scout said:

"My brother is welcome."

"The Flying Elk is warm."

"I should say so," was Dashing Charlie's response, and the chief took a small glass from his pocket and looked at himself.

The glass was a handsome hand-mirror, evidently robbed from some fancy dressing-case, and it revealed the chief in all his hideousness.

He did not seem pleased, and Dashing Charlie offered to repaint him, the invitation being accepted.

So he washed in the brook, and getting out his paints handed them over to the scout.

He first put on a coat of jet-black paint, encircled the mouth and eyes with bands of white and touched up the end of the nose and center of cheeks with red, drawing a streak of the latter across the forehead.

Flying Elk seemed delighted with the artistic work of the Yellow Hair, and then told him that he had had no vision.

"The Yellow Hair has had a vision."

"He saw a dead man in his vision, and this means that a battle is to be fought and many fall."

"He saw a pale-face in deadly peril, and the arrow of a red-man killed."

"He saw a red-man mount a horse not his own, a spotted horse, belonging to a big chief, and this vision told him that there would be a victory and many ponies captured."

Flying Elk did not attempt to sift this vision.

He simply regarded it as all in favor of the red-man.

He was satisfied, and in the gathering twilight the two, the scout and the chief, mounted their horses and rode back toward the camp of the band.

They found that all had been arranged as had been directed, the Indians having placed their ponies in a small meadow beyond the Pass, while they were stationed among the rocks and securely concealed.

They had eaten their supper and were ready for the fray.

Their position was a splendid one for an ambush, and did the soldiers march into it the slaughter would be terrible, for it would be a one-sided battle, a fight with a hidden foe.

Upon reaching camp the scout suggested that an Indian be sent down the trail, halting at the camping-place this side of the Point of Rocks, to see if the soldiers were coming.

The truth was, the scout began to grow very anxious as to whether the soldiers had discovered his hand and the writing on the rocks.

He knew that Kit Kirby and the lynx-eyed scouts were along; but if they did not pass the spot before night they would not see it.

If not, the soldiers would march into the very ambush he had intended they should avoid, for they would also miss the note stuck on a stick in the face of the cliff.

He wished that he had told Red Soldier to remain on hand in the valley and inform the commander of the troops just what to do when he came, instead of sending the Pawnee to the Bee Hive Mountain.

He had managed to give a warning by the pointing hand of stones and the writing on the rocks, and afterward with the arrow drawn in the trail, and indicating that the cliff should be searched for signs where he had left the letter.

Still, he could not but feel terribly anxious for the result.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE MIDNIGHT SCOUT.

As the time came near when something should be done, Dashing Charlie grew more and more anxious, until at last he decided to appeal to his red comrade, Flying Elk, once more.

To go alone he knew would be asking too much, and he felt too that he would be followed by some of the red-skins who doubted him still.

So he said to Flying Elk that he thought if he would give him two of his best braves he would go back upon the trail and place the exact position of the soldiers.

This the Flying Elk thought was an excellent idea.

The Indian can bear far more suspense than can his white brother, but the Indians had already passed through a severe ordeal, they had another, the severest one, ahead of them, and if they could learn just where their foe was and what doing, they would ask no more.

The chief Fighting Fox was asked for, but Dashing Charlie, for fear of a search, said that he had seen the chief very soundly sleeping over among the rocks.

And he muttered to himself:

"Yes, and he'll not wake up between now and Judgment, either."

So the Flying Elk decided it that the scout should go, and sent with him Cunning Cat and Bad Face Bear.

"Two of the biggest devils in the outfit, and as hard to get away with as grizzlies, if it comes to a fight," muttered Dashing Charlie.

He knew the two Indians also as being unfriendly to him, and hating even the renegade pale-faces who had cast their lot with their tribe.

But he was in for it, and so made up his mind that if he saw any signs of treachery, they would start off very quickly upon the same trail that Fighting Fox had taken.

Mounting their horses, the three rode down the valley, an Indian on each side of the scout, who thus found himself in a very unpleasant situation.

He, however, determined to take it calmly and be on the alert for treachery.

He told them of how the pale-faces were

afraid of them, and that they were well known to the soldiers by name, and dreaded by them.

He told them, too, of how he was hated by his own people and would be hanged if caught, and that he would teach them all he knew about pale-face fighting and cunning.

Then he made known to them confidentially that he thought Fighting Fox a wonderful young chief, and that he had spoken to him about them, Cunning Cat and Bad Face Bear.

Dashing Charlie then told them that he had planned this ambush, but they must not tell Flying Elk, his brother, for he might not like it; but that they might tell Fighting Fox when they found him.

In fact, knowing the chief Cunning Cat, and Bad Face Bear, the warrior, to be the devoted friends of Fighting Fox, he gave them the impression that he thought he would make a better chief than Fighting Elk.

To his joy he found that he had allayed their suspicions, or he had won them over, unless they were playing a deeper game also, for no one can tell just when and where an Indian is going to break out for or against you.

They had now ridden some three miles from the ambush, and the scout suddenly halted.

His keen eye had caught the glimpse of light ahead.

He knew that the soldiers had camped just where his letter had directed.

But were they encamped there, or on the trail making their way around as he had told them to do?

He pointed out the lights, and the three dismounted, creeping nearer on foot.

Then they discovered in the distance the camp fires, with the sentinels, stationary as statues, standing on post.

It was a rare temptation for Cunning Cat and Bad Face Bear, to creep nearer still and get a shot at one of those upright sentinels.

They wished to change their position from the perpendicular to the recumbent, but they knew it would spoil all.

Dashing Charlie's keen eyes had detected the cheat, after a careful observation, for he saw that they were *dummy sentinels*.

Then the scout was happy, for his letter had been received, and the troops were even then on the march to the rear of the ambushed Indians, and Red Soldier was guiding Lieutenant Gibbs and the cowboys to attack the crippled outfit on its way to the red-skins' village.

He could not ask for more, and so wisely suggested a return to their Indian companions.

The two red-skins felt grieved to leave the sentinels without a shot, but they started back, mounted their horses, and rode on toward the ambush.

Dashing Charlie knew that the soldiers would not attack until it was just dawn, and so he hoped for a few hours' rest, for he was very tired, after all he had passed through in the way of anxiety and hardships.

He returned to the camps in better feeling with the Chief Cunning Cat and warrior Bad Face Bear, than when he started out.

They told Flying Elk of their discovery, and word was passed around for all except the Indian sentries to seek rest.

Then Dashing Charlie placed his horse near where he could get him quickly, and knowing that the soldiers would attack from the rear, and that a six pound shell would be the first thing to come into camp and awaken them, he took up his quarters under the lee of a large rock as a shelter.

"Now to await the Judgment Day," he muttered, as he sunk to sleep.

Flying Elk had gone the rounds of his ambush, saw where the ponies were stationed under guard, and placed the sentries in position.

At last he had sought his blankets, awaiting eagerly the glory of the fight on the morrow.

Knowing that it was the Indians' nature to revel in fighting and cruelty, and having been treated well by the Flying Elk, Dashing Charlie had felt pity for him, and hoped he would have a chance to save him.

Thus the camp lay in deep repose awaiting the morrow.

CHAPTER XLIX.

RED MEN AND WHITE MEN MEET.

The gray, hazy light of coming day was just beginning to show itself over the mountain-tops, while yet all was darkness in the valley.

The Indians in their ambush were yet sleeping soundly, all except the sentinels, and red-skin sentinels never sleep.

Back up the valley the ridge was looming up dark and silent, not a red-skin suspecting that a soul was hiding there.

That there were half a thousand soldiers there ready to give battle to a foe in their own cunning, treacherous way, the darkness yet hid.

The soldiers were awakened one by one. The drowsy horses were led into line, the mufflers taken from their feet, the cannon-wheels and caissons were stripped of their wrappings, and the infantry were in position to open at long range from their points of vantage.

The cavalrymen stood by their horses, their

revolvers loosened in the holsters, their sabers with hilt at hand, and their carbines slung at their backs.

Major Dunn had neglected nothing and was only awaiting the brightening a little more of the dawn, to give the word to the gunners who stood, port-fires in hand, ready to begin the battle.

At last several lights flashed along the line, and the Gentleman Sport dashed up to the commander of the battery and said:

"Major Dunn's compliments, sir, and he desires you to open fire."

The officer saluted, and then his clear voice was heard, breaking the painful silence:

"Fire!"

Six guns burst forth almost together, six red flames shot out, illumining the scene, and amid the roar the whizzing shells went on their way, straight for the corral of ponies.

Then followed the bursting of the shells, and half a thousand throats echoed in one wild cheer.

The action was begun.

"Now turn your guns upon the ambushed Indians," came the command.

And their position amid the rocks on each side of the pass was now made out in the gray light.

As the guns roared again the sounds of wild snorting, neighing and trampling of horses were heard, and the Indian ponies, unused to artillery, frightened into a panic, started in one mad stampede down the canyon, rushing over their terrified Indian guards in the wild rush.

Hot and fast rained the shells now among the rocks, and, as the Indians sprung from cover, the infantry in their positions turned their rifles upon them.

Then the bugle sounded the call for the infantry to advance along the ridges under cover of the artillery fire, and the cavalrymen mounted and rode to the summit of the ridge ready to charge.

It was a grand, but appalling sight, and one never to be forgotten when the bugle sounded the charge of the troopers.

Like an avalanche of flesh and steel they rode down into the valley, five troops of gallant Boys in Blue, and with the firing of the guns, the bursting of the shells, the rattle of the infantry rifles, thundering of hoofs and cheers, it was a scene there in the early dawn for the brush of Gustave Doré who wished to paint a picture of hell.

Major Dunn had mounted, and with Grayson Gurney by his side as *aide-de-camp*, a lieutenant acting as assistant adjutant-general, and Kit Kirby and his scouts serving as couriers, he rode down the ridge trail into the valley, the artillerymen still keeping up their fire.

That the thousand and more Indian ponies had stampeded down the canyon and were lost to their masters forever the soldiers saw.

And the Indians? They had been as completely surprised as it was possible for them to be.

The roar of the cannons had aroused them, and then they had seen their ponies rush beyond their grasp.

Fast and furious the shells fell into their midst, and as they broke cover the infantry sent the leaden bullets pattering like rain into their ranks.

They knew not the strength of their foes, and, attacked in the rear, which they had not deemed possible, they supposed them a separate force that was marching west and had come upon them.

Major Dunn's command they deemed still encamped down the valley a few miles away.

So believing they dared not fly in that direction, for the soldiers they believed would capture their ponies and ride back upon them.

What, then, could they do but fly?

They could not stand and fight, for they were divided, some on one side of the valley some on the other.

The mountain ranges then were their only refuge, and chiefs called to chiefs to fly upward into the fastnesses of the mountains, and to seek their own country and their village.

Revenge was not to be thought of then, any more than was resistance.

They could only fly for their lives.

The dead must be left where they fell, the wounded must care for themselves as best they could.

And up the steep mountain-sides, seeking shelter among rocks and trees as they ran, the red-skins climbed.

Upward were pointed the guns, and shells crashed around them, tearing limbs from trees and sending myriad pieces of rocks about, to do further damage.

Upward the rifles of the infantry were turned and they too picked off the red-skins, for a lesson must be taught them they would long remember.

They must be shown that the pale-face was doomed to triumph over the red-skin, and taught that the settlements should not be raided, women and children carried off, men murdered and horses burned.

They must have a defeat they would never cease to remember.

CHAPTER L.
FOUND.

THE cowboys, led by Captain Arleigh, had swept down the Valley of Death, and there were huddled a few hundred red-skins who had determined to sell their lives dearly.

Showers of arrows greeted the troopers, and men and horses went down, but the splendid charge was not checked, though flying red-skins on the mountain-sides turned and sent shots and arrows down upon the mounted men.

Bravely the Indian band at bay stood their ground, and the next instant the troopers were upon them.

There was a sudden rebound, then an advance, the rattle of revolvers and clashing of sabers, and the cavalry had passed on.

But only to wheel for another charge.

But no, the red-skins wanted no more of that mad work at close quarters.

The savage could not withstand the white man in such fierce and furious combat, and the Indians rushed for the hills.

Up they went, while over the dead-and-dying-strewn field back came the terrible troopers for another hand-to-hand conflict.

But they were too late, for near the mountain-side their game had escaped them.

The steep mountain-side checked the cavalrymen, and the battle was over.

Hundreds of Indians had fallen.

They lay in the valley, and dotted the mountain-sides, the dead and the wounded.

And there were blue-coats scattered among them, too.

Pale faces were upturned among the red facts.

The battle was over, and while three troops went off in pursuit of the runaway ponies of the Indians, the infantry and artillerymen began to look to the wounded.

Down into the valley rode Major Dunn, Grayson Gurney by his side, and a couple of scouts to carry orders following, while the lieutenant acting as adjutant was taking notes.

Halting at the pass, Major Dunn glanced upward, and there he saw a man seated upon a rock, and by his side, held by a rein, was his horse.

The man had been there through the entire combat.

As the major now rode within easy range of his voice, he took off his broad sombrero and said:

"A grand victory, sir."

"Dashing Charlie!" cried the major, with delight.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Are you a prisoner?"

"Free as air, sir."

"Come down here."

"Yes, sir."

And down the steep slope, leading his horse, came Dashing Charlie, and he was met by Major Dunn, who said:

"Emmett, I owe this victory to you, and I frankly admit it."

"We are friends for life, and here is my hand on it."

"Thank you, Captain Dunn, but you did the fighting, and did it well, too."

"This is Major Dunn now, Dashing Charlie," said Grayson Gurney.

"Ah, Mr. Gurney, you are here, too?"

"Yes, and he has done yeoman service for me, I am happy to say, as my aide."

"Permit me to congratulate you, Major Dunn, upon your deserved promotion, sir."

"I thank you; but where were you in the fight?"

"A silent but most attentive witness, sir, perched up there on that rock, behind which I went to bed last night, expecting to be awakened with a cannon-ball."

"Being a cross between a red-skin and a white man, for you see I have Indian togs on, and my war-paint, too, I was afraid to show myself to the soldiers for fear I would get a shot, and kept in hiding from the Indians, feeling sure I would be picked off."

"So I watched the fight, and I never saw anything so grand or terrible."

"You have lost heavily, sir, but you have gained a splendid victory, and it ends Indian troubles for a long while to come, I feel certain."

"But the sad part of it is, that we have not found Lieutenant Gibbs or the soldiers captured."

"Oh, they are all right, major, for I borrowed Dan Donohoe and his cowboys three nights ago and rescued the lieutenant and two men, and—"

"Bravo for you, Dashing Charlie; but where is he?"

"Within sound of your guns, sir, for he has gone with the cowboys to strike the crippled outfit of Indians on their way home, and they have six soldiers as prisoners."

"Better and better; but do you know aught of Red Soldier, the Pawnee, for he has not been seen for days, and we fear he is slain, or a prisoner?"

"Not he, sir, for nothing but rum will ever kill Red Soldier."

"You know of him, then?"

"I do, sir, for he went as guide to Lieutenant Gibbs and the cowboys— Hark!"

All remained silent, and distinctly to their ears came the sound of running hoofs.

"The troops are returning."

"No, Major Dunn, that sound comes from up the valley," was Dashing Charlie's reply.

CHAPTER LI.

THE LIEUTENANT'S ATTACK.

THE Bee Hive Mountain, where the band of cowboys, under command of Lieutenant Fred Gibbs and their chief, Dan Donohoe, had sought refuge, was a place which might safely be called a most secluded retreat.

No one would suspect that it could become a hiding-place for even a dozen men, let alone over half a hundred.

It appeared from even close observation to be a barren hill-top.

And yet the scout Dashing Charlie knew its advantages well, and so had sent the cowboys there in hiding.

They had followed his directions and reached the summit without accident and there had found pasturage for their horses, with a number of springs of water as cold as ice and as pure.

A camp had been made where the men could be comfortable, and the prisoners had not been neglected or ill-treated more than to see that they were perfectly secure from escape.

There was no put-on about Fred Gibbs, and he accepted the situation with the men, sharing their food, and the blankets of Dan Donohoe, for he was minus his own, not having had them on his saddle when captured.

They knew that they were in a dangerous position if the whole band of Indians should discover their whereabouts and surround the hill, yet they felt confident of keeping them at bay until help should arrive from the soldiers.

But they knew that their position was a good one from which to strike in the rear of the red-skins, and they had every confidence in Dashing Charlie.

A couple of sentinels were kept each day and night on the watch, and one of them felt a sudden dread as he beheld an Indian coming up the hill.

He was on foot, and the sentinel was sure that their hiding-place had been discovered, and so gave the alarm.

Lieutenant Gibbs at once ran to the post, and one glance showed him that the Indian was no foe.

"Why, it's Red Soldier, the Pawnee," he cried.

All felt relieved at this, and Red Soldier came rapidly forward.

"Glad to see young chief, heap glad."

"Dan here, too, and the boys; good boys, like them all mighty heap," said the Pawnee, smiling blandly on all.

"What on earth brought you here, Red Soldier, and how did you find us?" asked Lieutenant Gibbs.

"Me ride some way."

"Horse down in valley eating grass."

"Me walk up hill."

"But who told you we were here?"

"Charlie."

"Oh! you have seen him?"

"Yes, leave him hour ago."

"In Indian camp."

"Ah! not a prisoner?"

"No, have good time and fool Indian."

"Make believe friend, and heap bad foe."

"Charlie great man."

"I agree with you, Red Soldier; but did he send you here?"

"Yes, have heap to tell."

Then, in his own peculiar way, the Pawnee told what had happened both to himself and the scout, since they had been on the red-skins' trail.

He told how the lieutenant could strike the crippled outfit of Indians at Black Mountain, where they would camp that night, and he would guide them to it, and also that they would be able to rescue the six soldiers who were prisoners.

It was with the greatest interest that all listened to what Red Soldier had to say, and though he went his own way about it, he made himself understood.

The men would have cheered Dashing Charlie and the Pawnee, but they dared not there.

It was just growing dark, and Lieutenant Gibbs said:

"We will have supper now, Red Soldier, and then start for Black Mountain, for it is a ride you say of thirty miles?"

"Yes, thirty miles."

"Well, we can get there before dawn and not break our horses down."

"Then we can go on the back trail to help the troops, or head the stampeded Indians off."

"We got signals from Dashing Charlie to-day on Point of Rocks, that soldiers would attack tonight, and to come to the valley when we heard firing; but it will be better to rescue those men and hit the Indians another blow nearer their village, after which we can fight the stragglers."

So said Lieutenant Gibbs, and the party were soon eating a hearty supper, in which Red Soldier joined them with great gusto.

Then the horses were saddled and Red Soldier led the way through the darkness down the hill.

There he found his horse and branching to the left they went on the trail for Black Mountain.

"Good horse," he said to Lieutenant Gibbs.

"Kill chief, get scalp, take horse; heap good time."

It was not exactly Lieutenant Gibbs's idea of a "good time," but he did not express an opposite opinion to that of the Pawnee.

It was two hours before dawn when they came near Black Mountain and turned into the trail.

"Camp here, me go find out," said Red Soldier, and he disappeared, leaving the cowboys to rest.

In half an hour he returned and reported that the Indian camp was a mile away and they could reach near it without being heard, as a cataract by the encampment would drown the sounds of the hoofs.

Just before dawn the cowboys started, and within a stone's throw of the Indian encampment they waited the coming of light to make the attack.

They had not long to wait before Lieutenant Gibbs gave the order to charge and surround the camp, and with wild yells the cowboys made the rush to do so.

CHAPTER LII.

ON THE HOME TRAIL.

THE surprise upon the crippled outfit was as complete as had been that upon the red-skins forces in ambush under the great chief Flying Elk.

Not an Indian suspected danger so near their camps, and only a guard was kept over the horses and prisoners.

There were fully thirty braves who were unhurt in the least, twice as many more who were but slightly wounded and double that number who were seriously injured.

Then came the prisoners who were unhurt.

The horses had slight wounds, many of them, but in a case of defense the Indians could rally in double the numbers of the cowboys, who had left a guard back with their prisoners.

The yells of the cowboys awoke the red-skins to action, and then came the popping of revolvers, not indiscriminately, but only when a cowboy felt he could kill his man, for strict orders had been given by Lieutenant Gibbs in regard to reckless firing, fearing to kill or wound the prisoners.

The situation of the red-skins was soon discovered, and then the cowboys rushed upon them in a charge that was irresistible.

Every man was as cool as though herding cattle, for they were men accustomed to death-struggles and Indian-fighting.

They threw no shots away.

The Indians could not withstand such a surprise and shock, and fled in terror on all sides, leaving their prisoners, badly wounded and horses in the hands of the victors.

Lieutenant Gibbs again received a slight wound, but made light of it, as did Dan Donohoe, who got an arrow in his shoulder.

Red Soldier was in the midst of the fight, and escaped without a scratch, while he held up a handful of scalps when the fight was over.

Two more cowboys sunk to rise no more, one was badly wounded, and a dozen or more had received more or less serious wounds, while nearly half of their horses had fallen.

When the fight was over, Lieutenant Gibbs did not press the pursuit, and lost no time in getting things to rights.

The dead cowboys were strapped on horses to bury elsewhere, as it was well known their bodies would be dug up by the Indians and every indignity placed upon them.

The wounded were made as comfortable as possible, and the prisoners, who had been with the cowboys since the other fight, were brought up and left in charge of the camp, only one of them being left unbound so that he could untie the bonds of his comrades after their pale-foes had departed.

Not a prisoner was taken further, and all were left to make their way to their village with their wounded comrades as best they could.

The unhurt ponies were taken, and *travois* were made and attached to Indian ponies for the several badly-wounded cowboys.

Then the retreat was begun, the Indians being left in terror and sullen silence, and having been taught a very bitter lesson for their raiding into the white settlements.

In case of meeting a force of red-skins returning to their homes, there was a guard of eight men formed by Lieutenant Gibbs for the wounded cowboys on the *travois*, and though augmented by the six soldiers, who were in ecstasies of joy at their rescue, the fighting force of the white men was cut down considerably; but all were full of grit and ready for another fight if it had to come their way.

On through the night they rode until a halt was at last called for several hours.

Just as they were about to resume their march again, in the gray of early dawn, all were

startled by the loud roar of the guns, only a few miles away.

A cheer broke from the cowboys at this, and the party moved on as rapidly as possible, the worst wounded of the cowboys having died at the camp, and the others telling their comrades not to mind the pain to them but to push on and join in the battle.

Louder and louder sounded the guns, and fierce and more furious came the rattle of smaller arms, showing that there was deadly work going on ahead of them.

The pace of the cowboys was increased to a trot, then a canter, and then they slackened down to a walk, for the battle had ended, except for scattering shots and the slow firing of the guns.

At last they came near the scene, and feeling that the wounded were in no danger then, that the soldiers had won the day, Lieutenant Gibbs rode ahead at a run, followed by the eight rescued soldiers, while by his side was Dan Donohoe, and his cowboys brought up the rear.

It was this rattle of hoofs which had caused Major Dunn to believe that a large force of Indians from the village was coming to attack them.

But Dashing Charlie explained who they were, and as the gallant lieutenant appeared in sight, he was greeted with one long, loud, prolonged cheer by the soldiers.

A waving of hats answered the salute, and a moment after Lieutenant Gibbs dashed up to where Major Dunn, Captains Arleigh, Dana and other officers with Dashing Charlie were sitting upon their horses, and another cheer rung out in hearty welcome, while Red Soldier brought a burst of laughter by shaking a bundle of scalps above his head and crying:

"Heap good time, Charlie.

"Plenty dead Injuns, plenty scalp.

"Pawnee heap happy red-man."

An hour after the Gentleman Sport, with the cowboys as an escort, was dispatched to the fort with the news of the victory, and the following morning the soldiers started upon their return in triumph.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE VOLUNTEER AIDE-DE-CAMP.

THERE was considerable anxiety felt at the fort from the determined resistance made by the Indians.

It seemed to presage a long and cruel Indian war.

Not to be found napping, Colonel Buckner had informed the commandants of all the forts and posts in his district and given warning to the settlements and mines.

About the fort outposts were placed miles further away than usual, and a company of cavalry had been sent to bring in the cattle which the cowboys had left unprotected, and keep them within easy range of the fort.

The sentinels at night were doubled, and several scouts were kept constantly on the go for signs of hostile approach.

Colonel Buckner received news regularly of the situation at the front, but he knew that it was possible for the tribes to throw thousands of warriors upon the war-path by a preconcerted action, and he was determined to be prepared should the force fighting Major Dunn be but half the red-skin hostiles, while the other half intended a direct attack upon him by a flank movement.

He had reduced his force of fighting men more than one-half by sending the troops he had to Major Dunn, but then he had four twelve-pounders and six light guns yet mounted upon the stockade-walls, while there were the two artillery companies, four of infantry and two of cavalry as defenders, not to speak of the hangers-on who could be pressed into service in time of need.

For the safety of the fort, if attacked, he felt no anxiety, but he did not wish a surprise, nor did he intend to be caught napping.

But the colonel did feel anxious about the force at the front.

Though holding every confidence in Major Dunn, he feared he was pushing too far into the Indian country.

Dashing Charlie he knew was as cautious as he was brave, as a scout, but the colonel had not the knowledge as to whether he was a prisoner or free.

He did not know, either, what had become of Dan Donohoe and his cowboys, whom he had an abounding faith in, and he did know that Lieutenant Gibbs and eight soldiers had been captured by the red-skins, and Red Soldier had mysteriously disappeared.

Such was the situation at the fort, with a feeling of suspense and an undercurrent of dread pervading all, from the highest to the lowest, when one afternoon a couple of horsemen were seen coming to the fort.

They came at a slow canter, as though their horses had been hard ridden.

Did their coming presage evil to the troops in the field?

Every eye was upon them as they drew nearer, and at last the officer of the day, who ascended to the lookout, recognized with his glass the Gentleman Sport and Dick Darling.

On came the two, and as they drew nearer every man gathered about the stockade gateway watched their faces with deepest interest.

What had they to tell?

But their faces were expressionless as far as revealing a defeat or victory.

"You will soon hear news, Captain Corbett," said the Gentleman Sport, as he rode on to the quarters of Colonel Buckner, and dismounting there, gave his horse to Dick Darling to carry on to their home.

The two animals of the riders looked as though they had been very hard pressed.

The colonel received the volunteer aide-de-camp cordially, while he said, calmly:

"Just from the front, I presume, Mr. Gurney?"

"Yes, sir, and sent by Major Dunn as the bearer of good news to you."

A slight exclamation of relief came from Beatrice, who was in the room with Miss Creola Gray, for the fair teacher often stopped at the headquarters, now on her way to her home after school in the afternoon.

"I am glad to hear that, Mr. Gurney, I assure you."

"Have you a letter for me, or verbal report only to make?"

"Major Dunn asked me to explain the situation, sir."

"I shall be glad to hear all you have to say, and you can speak before the ladies, for I suppose there is nothing to conceal, as it is a victory you have to tell of?"

"Nothing to conceal, Colonel Buckner, for it was a grand victory, a perfect stampede on the part of the Indians, though they were I believe nearly four to one against us."

"In the first place, sir, let me say that Dashing Charlie had gone after the cowboys, for when taken prisoner he played the man who had been his Double, the Counterfeiter Lennox, and who was a particular friend of Flying Fox, the head chief of the Indians."

"Just like Emmett."

"He played his part so well, sir, that Flying Elk set him free, and accepted him as his white brother."

"Feigning fatigue, Emmett went off to himself, and slipped away for the cowboys, led them after the crippled party of Indians, leaving Lieutenant Gibbs and two soldiers with them, and rescued them."

"Good!" cried the colonel, while Beatrice gave vent to her joy by the one sound:

"Glorious!"

"A splendid fellow, that Scout Dashing Charlie," remarked Creola Gray.

And so the volunteer aide went on with his story until he had told all that had happened, and at once the glorious news was spread around the fort and cheer after cheer rent the air.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE COLONEL'S GUEST.

COLONEL BUCKNER was well aware that Grayson Gurney, the Gentleman Sport, had done his duty well at the front, or he would never have been sent by Major Dunn as the bearer of the news of what had been done.

This was an honor only bestowed upon a man who had won deserved notice for courage on the field.

Of his own exploits Grayson Gurney had been exceedingly modest, though he had received two slight wounds and had a couple of horses shot under him.

In fact Major Dunn and his officers had had an opportunity of seeing just what a splendid soldier and officer the Gentleman Sport would have made, had he chosen the army as a profession.

Beatrice was more than ever before cordial to the Gentleman Sport, apparently anxious to atone for her doubt of him before, while there was, what might be considered a hidden sneer in the remark of Creola Gray to him:

"You should have been a soldier, Mr. Gurney, for I am sure you would have won fame and promotion."

"Promotion is too slow in the army, Miss Gray, for me to care for a military life," was the quiet answer, yet Beatrice saw that the Gentleman Sport had seen the covert sneer beneath Miss Gray's remark, as she had.

"I am more and more convinced that these two knew of each other, if they have not met before," said Beatrice to herself.

The colonel invited the volunteer aide to have supper with them that evening, and Creola Gray was urged to remain also and consented.

Then the Gentleman Sport went to his own cabin to prepare his toilet, after his rough service in the field, and the colonel and the ladies had an opportunity to talk over all they had heard.

Grayson Gurney had told them fully of Lieutenant Fred Gibbs's rescue, the placing of the cowboys on Bee Hive mountain to await results, the rescue of the six soldiers, and the scene between Red Soldier and Dashing Charlie when the Indian saved the scout from capture by Flying Fox, for all this had been made known before Grayson Gurney left camp.

That the counter ambush had been arranged by Dashing Charlie had also been told, and also

as to what a complete surprise it had been to the red-skins, whose losses had been very great when, all circumstances taken into consideration, the troops had suffered very little.

"Well, they have been taught a lesson they will never forget, and which it will take them long to rally from," the colonel said.

At the appointed hour the Gentleman Sport put in an appearance at the colonel's home, and received a pleasant greeting from its occupants, though Creola Gray appeared to be rather distant in her manner.

Grayson Gurney was dressed very handsomely, and was the polished man of the world.

He made himself more than agreeable, showed a wondrous knowledge of what was going on in the world, discussed the affairs of Europe with the colonel, and was really a very brilliant conversationalist.

But for all of his powers of fascination Beatrice Buckner did not like him.

She seemed to feel that there was something about the man which caused her to doubt him.

She could not bring herself to the belief that he was not playing a part for some purpose.

Why was he out on the frontier, spending his days in hunting wild beasts, when he was so well fitted to adorn any drawing-room of the metropolis?

Before his coming to the fort she had heard he had lived alone in a cabin on the frontier.

Was there not some reason for his having thus exiled himself from his fellow-men and women?

Was there not some shadow hanging over his life, some feeling that he wished to shun the world for reasons he cared not to make known?

Certainly crime could not have driven him to the frontier.

Was it a case of unrequited love?

Who could tell?

At any rate, whatever it was, Beatrice felt that she could detect its imprint upon him, that the stamp of some wrong was there, whether of his own doing or the act of others against him, she could not tell.

"I wish I could like him, for it may be simple prejudice on my part that I do not; but I cannot."

"I cannot either understand him, or I understand him too well."

So mused Beatrice Buckner to herself as she sat listening to her uncle and Grayson Gurney talking together.

"We may begin to look for the first arrivals of our gallant troops to-morrow, you think, Mr. Gurney?" said the colonel, as the Gentleman Sport at last arose to go.

"Yes, sir; some of them will arrive to-morrow, but Major Dunn will keep a strong guard against the crippled brigade, so the march of the main force will be slow, I think."

"Miss Gray, if you are going home, may I offer my services as an escort?"

"Thank you, sir; I will be pleased to have your company," was the response of the handsome teacher.

And soon after the two departed together from the colonel's quarters.

CHAPTER LV.

KNOWN TO EACH OTHER.

WHEN Grayson Gurney left the quarters of Colonel Buckner he offered his arm to Creola Gray and she took it in silence.

But hardly had they gone beyond the headquarters lights when she withdrew her hand.

"For appearances sake keep my arm, for it would look discourteous in me should we meet any one," he said, in a low, firm voice.

"For appearances sake, yes," was the answer.

And the two walked on in silence.

The home of each was out of the stockade-walls, for Creola Gray made the storekeeper's pleasant cabin her dwelling-place, and she had become very dear to both Captain Mayhew and his estimable wife.

The Gentleman Sport's home was upon the opposite side of the stockade, and some distance away from where Creola Gray dwelt.

They passed the sentinel, the man giving the countersign, and had nearly reached the Mayhew home, when Grayson Gurney said abruptly:

"Why are you here?"

"I thought that you knew."

"Upon my account?"

"Of course."

"Well?"

"Well?"

"Have you nothing to say for yourself?"

"At the proper time, yes."

"Why not now?"

"This is no place for such a conversation as you and I must have."

"Where shall it be?"

"You know my schoolhouse?"

"Yes, of course."

"To-morrow will be Saturday."

"Well?"

"I shall be alone there, for I go there every Saturday morning."

"That means I am to come there?"

"Yes."

"At what hour?"

"Suit yourself, for I believe you take your ease when in camp and sleep late."

"I will be there by ten at any rate."

"That will suit me."

"I will not fail you."

Then a silence fell between them again, and soon after they arrived at the Mayhew cabin.

The captain had closed his store, and having come home, was enjoying his pipe upon the little piazza, while Mrs. Mayhew sat near him.

They seemed surprised to see Miss Gray come home under escort of the Gentleman Sport, and he was cordially invited in.

For reasons of his own he accepted, and the conversation turned upon the late Indian troubles, the Gentleman Sport telling the captain all he knew about them.

After a short visit he took his leave and went to the officers' club, where he held honorary membership.

There he met a lot of congenial spirits, and his coming was greeted with an uproarious welcome.

"Come, Gurney, we will have some wine over the news you bring," cried one.

"You have made a hero of yourself, according to the reports of your guide, Dick Darling."

"Tell us all that has happened at the front."

"Can it be true that Gibbs has been rescued?"

"And by Dashing Charlie?"

"And the soldiers also who were captured?"

"Were the red-skins utterly routed?"

"It was said that there were hundreds of Indians slain and wounded."

"And a dozen or more of our men were killed and half a hundred wounded."

"Just tell us all about it, Gurney, for there is the wine to warm you up."

Such were the questions and comments showered upon the Gentleman Sport, by the couple of dozen young officers gathered in the club-rooms.

"Well, gentlemen, the best way to please you all is to report all that there is to tell you in my own way, so I'll begin at the time when I was held up in the mountain-top with Darling and that terror Red Soldier, for he is a devil in a fight and upon the war-path."

"Yes, start on the trail at the commencement, Gurney, and tell us the whole story," said the major of the Infantry Battalion, and who was next in command to Colonel Buckner at the fort.

So the Gentleman Sport told his story over again, and in his modest way, which caused those who knew him to feel that he had not been a laggard in the fighting that had taken place.

He had spoken with the greatest praise of the conduct of Lieutenant Gibbs and Dashing Charlie, not forgetting Red Soldier, the Pawnee.

He had also had a great deal to say of the gallantry and ability of Major Dunn and his troops, and of the able manner in which the campaign was conducted.

After several glasses of wine all around, in which the Gentleman Sport was warmly toasted along with the brave fellows in the field, Grayson Gurney arose to take his leave.

"It is early, Gurney, so do not go," cried one.

"Yes, let us at least hold out a few hours more."

"Make a night of it," cried a young second lieutenant who was only too willing to have his suggestion carried out.

But Grayson Gurney pleaded his great fatigue, his two slight wounds which must be looked after, and soon after took his departure.

He crossed the Plaza to the gate in the other side of the stockade, and having given the countersign was passed out by the sentinel.

He was soon at his cabin, and found Dick Darling awaiting him, the guide calmly enjoying his pipe and half asleep.

Upon his walk home the Gentleman Sport's thought had not been busy over his late adventures at the front, nor upon the scenes at the officers' club.

No, his mind was dwelling upon his meeting with Creola Gray, and he muttered over and over again:

"Why has that woman come here?"

"Well, the morrow will tell, must tell."

CHAPTER LXI.

THE MEETING AT THE SCHOOL-HOUSE.

WHEN Grayson Gurney reached his cabin he found his devoted friend and guide awaiting him.

"Well, Dick, it seems you have made quite a hero of me, from all I have heard to-night," said the gentleman sport pleasantly.

"No more than you deserved, sir, for Major Dunn paid you the highest compliments."

"Well, I did my duty, I suppose, and it will help me here in the fort to a great extent; but you must not lay it on too thick, Dick."

"I only talked to the men, sir, and gave them a history of the fight."

"Well, it was a hard campaign, though a short one, and will bring peace upon the border for a long while."

"It will be awful quiet here now, sir, with the outlaws all captured and the Indians terribly whipped."

"But the outlaws were not all captured, Dick, for a number of them were killed."

"I know that, sir; but the band was wiped out."

"I guess you are right then, or they will be when this execution takes place."

"They intend to shoot them, sir, the soldiers do?"

"Colonel Buckner told me to-night, that as soon as all the troops were back in the fort he would order the execution of the thirteen men now prisoners here."

"It will be a terrible execution, sir, but thirteen is an unlucky number, and I suppose they must go."

"Yes, for Colonel Buckner has the full power to act and he will do so, for he vows he will end lawlessness upon this frontier."

"But now, Dick, I believe I shall turn in, as the sailors say, for I am very tired, and you are also."

"Yes, sir, I am," and soon after the lights were out in the cabin of the Gentleman Sport, and quiet rested upon the inmates.

But Dick Darling was up bright and early the next morning, and when the Gentleman Sport arose at nine o'clock he found a most tempting breakfast awaiting him, for one of the guide's greatest accomplishments was his excellent cooking.

But the Gentleman Sport appeared to have little desire to eat, and was soon on his way to the school-house, his gun on his shoulder as though he was merely strolling about the timber for a shot at any game that might cross his path.

He took a trail leading near the school-house, and, as he passed, suddenly turned and went to the door, for he cared not to have any curious eye see the meeting there.

The school-house was a large log cabin, standing nearly a quarter of a mile from the stockade, fronting on a brook and picturesquely located.

It was Saturday and the voices of the two-score children who attended were silent now in the timber.

In the doorway, sketch-book in hand, sat the fair teacher.

Her face was very pale now, and her eyes burned with an angry light.

She certainly was a very handsome woman, and one to command admiration anywhere.

As the Gentleman Sport arrived, she did not rise from her chair, nor did she have one near for him.

She did not even acknowledge his salutation, but said:

"Sit there on the doorstep, Gurney, where every one near can see that you do not enter the school-house."

"Why?"

"I must be particular not to be seen with you."

"Fearing to hurt your reputation, eh?"

"Yes."

"It is a pity that you were not always so particular."

"What do you mean?"

"I refer to your flirtation with one who was unknown to me, but scandalized you with all who saw it."

"I suppose I must call you by the name you are known here, so as not to make any slip when we meet."

"Of course, it would be better, Creola Gray."

"Well, let me tell you now, what I intended to make known to you the very day that you deserted me."

"I do not care to hear any excuses now."

"But you shall."

"That is a harsh word to use to me."

"I use it nevertheless."

"Now hear me, for you shall, if I have to tell you before Colonel Buckner."

He winced at this, and said:

"Oh, go ahead, for I devote the morning to you."

"The man whose visits I sought to conceal from you, and of whom you were jealous, though I did not know you were aware of our meeting—was my brother."

"A likely story, when your brother died long before."

"He did not die, but wished it to be so believed."

"And he is living now?"

"No, for he met his fate at this very fort under the name of Graydon Donaldson."

"Ha! I knew that man."

"So he was your brother, eh?"

"He was; but where did you know him?"

"Here."

"And he knew you?"

"Not as you knew me," was the reply in a tone as though he did not wish to answer the question directly.

"Well, it was my sinful brother whom you heard visited me at my home, and of whom you became jealous and deserted me."

"I tried to catch him and kill him."

"Falling in this, I decided to go my way alone through life, and so left you, my sweet wife, to do as your humor suited you," was the cool response of the Gentleman Sport.

CHAPTER LVII.

A REVELATION.

FOR a moment the woman was silent, after the man had spoken, and then she said, with a sneer:

"So you still call me your wife?"

"Well, legally, I suppose you still are."

"Though you deserted me over four years ago."

"I had cause, or supposed that I had."

"Yet you now know that you had not."

"I saw the man once, and afterward knowing Graydon Donaldson here, know that he was the man, now that you say he was your brother."

"Such was the case."

"You should have told me who he was."

"I intended doing so the very day you left me."

"You waited until too late."

"No; you were glad of a chance to desert me."

"You had become tired of your bargain, in fact was sorry you had made me your wife as soon as you discovered that I had not the fortune I was credited with."

"That same sinful brother squandered his inheritance, and then swamped mine."

"I did not tell you I was poor, for I loved you, even though I saw your nature was a sordid one."

"I was fearful you would not wed me, and that you wanted my money, or at least that I should be rich."

"I hoped to win you so to me that you would be happy with me."

"I also deemed you a very rich man, and supposed my having but little would make no difference."

"The result was that the little I had you got from me, squandered it all, and then was very glad of an excuse to desert me."

"Well, you went your way, and I went mine."

"And why are you here, may I ask?"

"I came here for two purposes."

"Yes?"

"One was to find my brother, and see if I could not bring him back to a life of honor in a home of our own."

"Yes?"

"The other was to find you."

"Here I am."

"Yes, and I found my brother in his grave."

"And your husband?"

"A man well off, though he left me poor."

"I gamble, you know."

"And more?"

"Ah!"

"You cheat at cards, as I know you did in the past, but no one suspects you here."

"That is a harsh charge to make against your husband."

"It is true."

"Prove it."

"I can prove more."

"What is it?" he asked, with sudden eagerness, his indifferent manner quickly disappearing.

"You are seeking a wife."

"I have one now, I am sorry to say."

"Yes, one whom you no longer love, if ever you did love her, and one who is poor."

"To what does all this tend?"

"It tends to the fact that I know you."

"Very well."

"It shows that I am aware that you are striving to win Beatrice Buckner."

"Ah!"

"She is rich, very rich, and is a very beautiful girl."

"Granted."

"She will inherit her uncle's money also."

"That may be, but that is far in the future, for Colonel Buckner has no thought of dying."

"Yes, but a soldier's life is very uncertain, and as his heiress she would be immensely wealthy."

"He might marry again."

"Yes, he might," was the very significant response of the woman.

"Then you are counting chickens before they are hatched, in the Beatrice Buckner case."

"How so?"

"She has in her own right the fortune left by her father, a ranch and cattle in Texas worth about sixty to seventy thousand dollars."

"You appear well posted."

"I am."

"But do not refer to the fortune in gold left her by her uncle."

"That she has not yet gotten hold of."

"How so?"

"Her uncle, a miner in New Mexico, when dying made her his heir, and sent Dashing Charlie to Texas after her father, his brother."

"The scout got him there before the miner died, and the latter started for Texas with the fortune loaded on pack-mules, for it was in gold."

"The road-agents pursued him, and he buried it on the trail, and was wounded in the attack on him."

"But he reached home, and whether the girl or Dashing Charlie know where that fortune is no one can tell; but it is hidden somewhere on the trail to Texas."

"That is the situation."

"And the gold is considerable?"
 "Worth a quarter of a million at least."
 "And what is the colonel worth?"
 "Are you interested?"
 "Yes."

"I have heard his fortune quoted, by officers who should know, at nearly half a million, for he owns some mining stock that is very valuable."

"And his young kinsman, Fred Gibbs, is also rich, I believe?"

"His uncle put him in the way of some investments, and he has put by thirty thousand, I believe; but what do your questions mean?"

"Just this," and the woman spoke in a low and earnest tone, "you wish to win that girl, Beatrice, and take chances on getting her fortune, so go to work and do so."

"And you?"

"Oh! I wish to win Colonel Buckner, and I will do so," was the reply, with a wicked little laugh and a determined look in her eyes.

CHAPTER LVIII.

TWO OF A KIND.

THE man fairly started at the bold, wicked plot of the woman.

He gazed at her a moment with wonder, and then his look changed to positive admiration.

At last he said in a voice that was full of meaning:

"Well, my sweet wife, you are a very remarkable woman, one well worthy to win in any game you attempt to play."

"And I can win, we can win if you are not chicken-hearted."

"Oh, trust me for not having the heart of a chicken, for those who know me best say that I have the heart of a wolf."

"But how about this little legal bond of matrimony between you and I?"

"I was deserted by you, and that separates us."

"You are not under your own name, so Grayson Gurney is not the man I married."

"You and I alone know the secret of the past, our past, and we will not be the ones to betray it when the blow of betrayal falls upon us."

"No, the secret will be safe enough, and as you hate me and I despise you, then there will be no love lost between us, and it will be best for us to live apart."

"Married to Colonel Buckner I shall dwell upon the frontier, and wedded to his adopted daughter, and her fortune, I am very sure you will seek a home far from here, hence our paths in life need never cross again, and our secret will sink with us into the grave when we shuffle off this mortal coil."

"What a wonderful woman you have become, my lovely Creola."

She turned fiercely upon him.

Her eyes flashed fire, her lips were set, her bosom heaved convulsively, and for some time she could not utter a word.

He was amazed, startled at the strange change in her.

When she had calmed her emotion partly she hissed forth:

"Shall I tell you why I am what I am, why I have changed, as you say, and become so different?"

"I should really like very much to know."

"It is because I have discovered how hollow life is."

"Listen to me, sir!"

"I am all ears."

"I idolized my mother and my father."

"So I have heard you say."

"Well, from old papers left by them, and which I never looked over until a year ago, I discovered that my mother had married a poor man, that she met my father, and lured by his riches and fascinating manners, for he was from the city, she had deserted her husband and ran away with her lover."

"Her husband took his own life, for he idolized her, and the day after she got the news she married my father."

"This was all told in her diary, which her own hand had written down for her daughter to read."

"My father too, not appearing in bad enough light by running off with the wife of another man, had gotten his property by destroying a will."

"This showed what my parents were."

"Then came my brother, whom I idolized, and he proved to be a scoundrel of the lowest type, as you know well."

"You came next, you a man whom I made a god of, and whom I felt could do no wrong."

"I found you to possess a sordid, selfish nature, a man without honor or remorse, and who deserted me when you doubted me, without asking for an explanation."

"I came here to find my brother in a dishonored grave, and to discover you the veriest of frauds, playing the rich gentlemen, fond of border sports, while you got your money by cheating the officers at cards."

"I found you plotting to wed Beatrice Buckner, when you knew that I yet lived."

"Well, my life was clouded already, I had had bitter thoughts, and so it made me bad of

heart, and I too plotted to win, and I tell you I shall marry Colonel Gabriel Buckner."

"And I shall wed Beatrice Buckner, so you will become my loved mother-in-law."

"I doubt it."

"You just said you intended to wed Colonel Buckner, and if I marry his daughter, then I will have you a very sweet mother-in-law."

"I do intend to carry out my plot to success, for he is a noble man, and I really begin to love him most dearly; but I doubt if you ever win the girl."

"You give no reason."

"She is not in love with you."

"Ah!"

"I mean it."

"Who is she in love with, for all girls are in love."

"I think you know."

"Who is it?"

"Her cousin."

"Fred Gibbs?"

"Yes."

"Bah!"

"Well, he is as handsome as an Adonis, brave, dashing, has money, is a beau-ideal soldier, and has won her heart."

"He is all that you say, but he shall not have her."

"A woman's will is a strong thing to combat, you know."

"I will not have it so."

"You may not be able to prevent."

"But you are a woman, and can."

"I might."

"What does that mean?"

"I will try, if I am paid for it."

"You want money?"

"Whoever saw a woman who did not?"

"Well, how much am I to pay for your services?"

"You are to give me five thousand dollars."

"It is too much."

"It is not!"

"I will call it half that amount."

"Pay what I demand, or lose the girl."

"All right; and it is that I win, or no pay."

"So be it," was the cool response of the woman.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE COMPACT.

"Now tell me how you are going to set about this double wedding business?" said Grayson Gurney, when the woman had brought him to terms about her price.

She was a woman of no ordinary mold.

Reared in refinement, brilliantly educated, and of a loving nature, she had had her life clouded by the actions of her wild young brother.

The death of her parents had been a terrible blow to her, and then when she had found out that her husband had married her for her money alone, she had almost given up in despair.

When he had deserted her, from his jealousy, as she supposed, of her brother, whom she was trying to aid and protect, it was a cruel blow to her.

Then she discovered the truth, that he had been glad to have an excuse for leaving her.

After this she was for a long time ill, and recovering her health once more she had decided to leave forever old associations and scenes, and go forth in the world to make her way as best she could.

Destroying all the old traps that had accumulated in a lifetime, she came across the old papers, diary and letters which told of her parent's treachery and sin.

This threw her into a relapse and she barely pulled through with life.

But her hardy constitution triumphed and she recovered.

But she was a changed woman, imbittered with the world.

At last, news came to her of her brother and she sought him in the far West.

She came only to find that he had, under an assumed name, gone down into the grave branded with dishonor.

Was it a wonder that the woman became imbittered?

She was robbed on her way to the fort, and penniless almost, she at last found disinterested friends, these who sought to help her.

She told Colonel Buckner and Beatrice of her relationship to the dead, dishonored soldier, and they at once shielded her, for as he did not bear her name no one need know at the fort that he was her brother.

She had been won by Colonel Buckner's courtly manner, his kind heart and his splendid record as a soldier, by his devotion to her, to love him, for she had begun to hate and despise Grayson Gurney.

And loving the colonel she had wondered if she could not hide her secret and yet be happy.

Then Grayson Gurney had again crossed her path, and like a tigress at bay she turned upon him.

He should not destroy her life, should not drive her out again into the world to work for her daily bread.

Riches, honor and happiness were before her, except that the wrong she did was buried in her

own heart, and this man who called her wife, who had wrecked her life, should not cross her path to destroy her every hope.

No, she would not be thwarted, and she would make him her slave, obedient to her will.

Beatrice, she saw, had seen from the very first, had distrusted her, and she had, in her changed nature, hated her for it.

She felt that the young girl read her aright, though she had not shown her feelings to her, and was glad to be friendly with Beatrice, for that brought her close to the colonel, and near him she could use her powers of fascination upon him.

She therefore would not allow pity for Beatrice in becoming united to Grayson Gurney, to stand in her way.

The girl had her eyes open, she argued, and if she could be turned from Lieutenant Gibbs and accept the Gentleman Sport, so be it.

That Colonel Buckner was deeply interested in her, she had seen from the first, and win him she would.

Such was the argument of the beautiful, designing and unfortunate woman, as she sat there in her school-room, while Grayson was seated upon the doorstep at her feet.

At last the man said:

"Well, you have been plotting, so what is the result?"

"I have been thinking."

"Then look out for trouble when a woman thinks."

"I have run over my life, and I have decided that the future shall be different from the past, while if I make a devoted wife to Gabriel Buckner, I can atone for my sin in wedding him."

"Where do I come into the scheme?"

"You are first to try and win the girl."

"Get your *congé*, or your acceptance from her."

"That will show whether she loves Fred Gibbs or not."

"Well?"

"If accepted, there is no need for more to be done."

"And I do not pay you?"

"Oh, yes, that is my right, and it shall be paid."

"If I get my *congé*?"

"Then I shall have to act."

"How?"

"I will accomplish my end for you by destroying her respect for Gibbs."

"How?"

"I will plot against him, and you can help me, so as to ruin him in her sight."

"Good! I will aid you, though it will not do for us to be thought friends."

"No; and here will be my post-office if I wish to communicate with you, or hear from you," and the woman showed him a crevice in the logs.

"All right, the compact between us is settled," and shouldering his gun, the man walked away.

CHAPTER LX.

THE RETURN OF THE TROOPERS.

DURING the afternoon following the meeting of the two strange people at the school-house, the sentinel on the lookout reported the coming of the troops.

They were sighted coming over the distant ridge and the assembly was at once sounded and the garrison called under arms to greet their returning comrades.

As they neared the stockade they were greeted with a salute of artillery and the band struck up a welcome, while cheer after cheer rent the air.

The wounded followed the advance and they were received right royally, while the returned soldiers gave a marching salute as they filed by Colonel Buckner who had mounted his charger to receive them, with his staff at his side.

Upon the piazza at headquarters were Beatrice, Creola Gray and the officers' families, and they too cheered and waved handkerchiefs.

Grayson Gurney stood by the side of Beatrice, having declined Colonel Buckner's invitation to mount his horse and join him in the review, with the remark:

"Thank you, colonel, but I have resigned my temporary commission, to be called into service again only when needed."

One glance at the returned warriors was sufficient to show that they had seen hard service.

Their horses looked gaunt and hard-riden, their trappings were tarnished, and their clothes torn and travel-stained.

A number in the line had their arms in a sling, or their heads tied up, showing wounds which they had not left the ranks for.

Others more unfortunate were on *travois*, and altogether the victors looked as men who had won a hard-earned battle.

Major Dunn, with his left hand bound up, left the line after filing by, along with Fred Gibbs, whose wound in the shoulder had begun to give him trouble, and the two rode up to Colonel Buckner, who greeted them with cordiality, and invited them to dine with him within the hour.

They accepted the invitation, and rode on to their quarters to make themselves presentable,

and meeting Dashing Charlie and Red Soldier, Major Dunn said:

"Emmett, the colonel desires to see you and Red Soldier."

"I will go at once, sir."

"Yes, me go, show big chief heap scalps so he be glad," added Red Soldier, who was mounted upon the pretty spotted horse which had belonged to Fighting Fox.

"Well, Dashing Charlie, I am glad to see you, and you also, Red Soldier, for you have done much to make this campaign a success."

"Yes, me have heap plenty scalps, big chief see!" and Red Soldier held up his bunch of a dozen or more.

"You certainly have not been idle, Red Soldier."

"Me kill plenty, get plenty scalps."

"Have good time."

"I am glad you enjoyed yourself, chief; but, Emmett, I know all that you have done on this expedition, and you have my warmest thanks."

"Come and see me during the afternoon, and let me hear your own story of your adventures, for I shall mention you most favorably in my report."

The colonel now returned to his quarters, and very soon after Fred Gibbs came, his wound having been dressed by the surgeon.

"Well, Fred, my boy, I welcome you back with all my heart, for I frankly confess, when I heard you were a prisoner to the red-skins, I never expected to see you again."

"And you would not, sir, but for Dashing Charlie and his allies, the cowboys."

"I owe my escape to the scout, sir."

"So I have heard from Mr. Gurney."

"And he is a plucky fellow, as all had a chance to see, sir."

"The major will give him a grand send-off when he arrives."

"Ah! here is your cousin, and we have Miss Gray to dine with us to-day, in honor of your return."

Beatrice and Creola Gray just then came in and warmly greeted the young aide, while Major Dunn arrived a few moments after.

"Dunn, my dear fellow, I take great pleasure in congratulating you upon your majority, and you certainly deserve another step up in promotion for your splendid campaign," the colonel said, with great earnestness.

"I have to share the honors, Colonel Buckner, with my officers and men, all of whom behaved nobly, while I desire particularly to thank you for the loan of your *aide-de-camp* here, who, if it was not before his face, I would say was most deserving of promotion."

"But, Colonel Buckner, there is one who also should receive the highest praise I can bestow: in truth, defeat, instead of victory would, I fear, have been the result, but for him."

"All of us, sir, officers and soldiers, appreciate and realize fully his invaluable services."

"I am glad to hear him thus spoken of, for Emmett has always won my regard and admiration, and he has never disappointed me in anything I have ever set him to do."

"Now, major, we will go in to dinner, and afterward we will hear your story of your victory, for I know there is much to tell which I have not yet heard."

The dinner was a good one, well served, and all enjoyed it greatly, after which the major and lieutenant told all about the expedition, to the great interest of the colonel, Beatrice and Creola Gray, and in the stories of each officer there was much said of Dashing Charlie, the scout, who had done so much to bring success upon the campaign.

And all through the evening Creola Gray appeared little like one who, a few hours before, had entered into a compact with the Gentleman Sport to bring dishonor upon the beautiful girl whose guest and pretended friend she was, and to unite herself by an illegal bond to the gallant soldier whom she had now learned to love, unmindful of the ties that bound her, a wife, to Grayson Gurney.

CHAPTER LXI.

ON THE EVE OF EXECUTION.

It was a couple of days before the garrison settled down to the usual routine of life.

Men had been killed, others wounded, a few were laid up from overwork, and, altogether, it took some little time to get into harness again as before.

The cowboys got off again with their cattle to a fresh grazing-ground, with no dread now of a raid by red-skins, though a scouting-party of a troop, with Kit Kirby as guide, had gone away on an extended circuit to see if there were any straggling red-skins about, though none were expected to be near after the terrible lesson they had been taught of late.

Dashing Charlie suffered some from his wounds, so was content to keep in his quarters, resting for a week.

Lieutenant Gibbs was also kept under the surgeon's care, but managed to spend most of his time at headquarters, where Beatrice never tired of hearing him tell of the short-lived but severe Indian campaign.

Thus the days passed away until the day set for the execution of a number of road-agents,

members of the band of Muello, the Mexican, a band of outlaws which had been entirely wiped out through the agency of Dashing Charlie.

The story brought in by Red Soldier, of his having slain the last of the Black Marauders, along with their chief, though believed, for he had the scalps to show for it, had been verified by Major Dunn sending a young officer and a party of cavalry, along with the Pawnee, to the scene where the five men had lost their lives.

The party had started from the last Indian battlefield, the Point of Rocks, and had overtaken the command just before arriving at the fort.

The report of the officer seemed like conclusive proof that he had found the bodies of the last of the outlaws, and that the chief, Muello the Mexican, was among them, for upon one body a mask was found and the outlaw chief always wore a mask, hiding his identity from his own men.

The wolves of course had played sad havoc with the bodies, but enough had been discovered to convince Colonel Buckner, when he heard the report, that the outlaw band would be utterly wiped out when the prisoners then in the fort should be executed.

As the day of execution came round a feeling of dread rested upon many, for through a frontier post, the thought of such a death visited upon fellow-beings, crime-stained though they were, was grating upon the feelings of officers and men alike, while the ladies fairly shrunk from hearing the dread occurrence discussed.

Colonel Buckner had endeavored to send the outlaws East for trial and punishment, but orders had come to try them at the fort, and then execute them if guilty, and he was not one to shrink from a duty, no matter how distasteful, and hence he issued the order for the men to be tried.

The trial was of short duration; witnesses gave proof of who the men were, and their sentence to death quickly followed.

On account of the number of men to suffer punishment, the colonel gave instructions for their execution by platoon-firing, and Lieutenant Gibbs was ordered to detail two men from each of the infantry companies at the fort, and take charge of the execution himself.

A gloom fell upon all in the fort the evening before the day of death, for the men, though outlaws, were human.

They had shown no mercy to those whom they had sought to rob, and had done untold damage to the settlements, had killed many an unfortunate traveler, and had fought the soldiers time and again remorselessly, for they had regarded them with hatred for attempting to check them in their career of crime.

But the right-thinking people on the frontier saw in the outlaws fellow-men, whose past they could not know.

Had real wantonness, a pure desire to do evil, brought these men to suffer what they must?

Or had they been driven by circumstances to commit some crime, which had sent them fugitives beyond the pale of civilization, and thus one evil step had led to another, until they had turned against all mankind?

Some of them might have been innocent of the first accusation against them, circumstantial evidence alone may have condemned others, and thus they had become fugitives, outcasts, and ended by becoming outlaws and hunted men.

With all this to consider, there were those who held sympathy for the condemned, and yet no pleading voice could save them.

Military law was inexorable, and justice must be meted out in proper punishment for the laws of the land broken, the taking of innocent lives, the resistance of the soldiers, robbing coaches, settlements and mines, and banding together as a common foe of man.

The fort chaplain had done his duty in praying with the men, and this semi-official act completed, he had eaten a hasty supper and retired to rest for the duties of the morrow, when he was expected to shine as an important factor in saving the souls of crime-stained men who had never thought of giving a fellow soul a chance before ushering them into eternity for the bare getting of a few dollars in gold.

And thus the sun went down on the eve of the day of execution at Fort Blank.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE DAY OF DOOM.

The day of doom was at hand. The sun arose brilliantly, but its bright rays did not dispel the shadows resting upon all.

Those who believe that soldiers become heartless, that a life in stirring scenes of war change a man's nature into one that is callous, know not what the true soldier is.

The fact that he freely offers his life for his country, or in defense of a good cause, proves that they possess noble natures.

They feel for each other, and for all in distress, and there was not one to gloat over the fact that the cruel outlaws were to suffer punishment for their crimes.

Of course the ladies and children at the fort were duly impressed.

The glad voices of the little ones were not

heard as usual, and all was as hushed as on a Sunday morning, when the good people of Fort Blank were putting on their semi-melancholy faces as a preparation for hearing the serious discourse of the post chaplain, who was always full of direct threats against the wicked, and brightest promises for the godly who remembered the pastor and the heathen in foreign lands, though he made no reference to the heathen and the needy in our own land.

The bugle-notes seemed to have taken on a more pathetic sound, as they rung out over the garrison, and the drums rolled in muffled, sad cadence.

At last the hour arrived for the execution, and the troops began to assemble from their quarters, marching toward the parade-ground.

The execution squad were the first to arrive, and then came the infantry, artillery and cavalry.

Open men carried the coffins, and the men to die were seated upon them, their hands in irons.

The band headed the procession, and soon Colonel Buckner and his staff came out of headquarters and mounted their horses in waiting.

Among the staff, having been invited to accompany the colonel, was Grayson Gurney, dressed in a neatly-fitting riding-suit, top-boots and black sombrero.

He rode his spirited horse Nero, and certainly looked very magnificent in the saddle, even though in contrast with officers in full uniform.

Dashing Charlie and his scouts, twenty in number, rode at their place as guides ahead of the band, and after a company of infantry followed the doomed men, thirteen in number.

Then came another company guard, the artillery, and the cavalry, excepting a troop who went as an escort for the colonel.

Bringing up the rear was Dan Donohoe and about thirty of his cowboys, who would not have missed the occasion for a herd of cattle.

Women and children peeped from the windows, admiring the colonel, Major Dunn, Lieutenant Gibbs and Dashing Charlie, and with sympathy on their faces for the doomed.

Red Soldier, the Pawnee, made it a gala affair, for he was rigged out in a new war bonnet of eagle-feathers falling to his heels, a gorgeous jacket of red, trimmed with gold lace and beads, a scarlet blanket brilliantly embroidered, fringed buckskin leggings, beaded moccasins and his quota of scalps.

His face was in full war-paint, black, with white to represent a skull, and painted most skillfully by a soldier artist in the fort.

His hands were painted red, streaked with white, and altogether he looked as he expressed it himself, "heap grand."

He took up his place directly in the rear of Colonel Buckner, and there was no power in the fort that could have removed him, less than a charge of cavalry or salvo of artillery, unless the colonel had said so.

But this he would not do, for Red Soldier was too good an Indian to have his feelings hurt.

So there he remained.

The bugle sounded the order to march when all was in readiness, and the band struck up a dirge as the command moved slowly out of the fort to the scene of execution over on the river-bank, half a mile away.

The chaplain was out in all the glory of his ecclesiastical dignity, and he somehow felt that he shared the honors of the day with the condemned men and the execution squad.

Slowly the column filed on its way out of the fort and took up its march for the spot in the distance where thirteen graves had been dug.

The doomed men gazed quickly toward that spot, the end of their journey on earth, and their faces became a shade more blanched, their eyes sunk deeper, the sterner ones dry and burning, those who could not hide their emotion, tearful and wistful, as their lips were set, their teeth clinched to keep back the throbbing cry for mercy that welled up in their throats, and to which they could not, or would not give utterance.

About the scene of execution the unmilitary portion of the fort's population had gathered.

There were also there wounded soldiers, others on sick leave, and hangers-on, women and children whose nature was not so refined that they cared to miss beholding an execution.

The column came to a halt, the soldiers formed in three sides of a square, the infantry in the rear, the cavalry and artillery on the wings, and the colonel, his staff, the execution squad, and doomed men fronting the thirteen graves.

The outlaws were formed in three squads, with five men in one, four in the other two, and the firing platoons faced them.

The coffin of each man was placed before him, and the chaplain passed down the line warning each man to die with a prayer upon his lips for mercy, and promising him then salvation, no matter what his sins had been on earth, thus saying a good word for death-bed repentance.

The outlaws, though white-faced, and a few quivering, were calm, though they started uneasily at the ominous words uttered by Lieutenant Gibbs:

"Attention, platoons!"

The volleys broke the silence, the outlaws sunk in their tracks, the law was vindicated.

and Grayson Gurney remarked, in his indifferent manner:

"And so endeth the chapter, and the last of Muello's band is wiped out."

Then back to the fort marched the soldiers led by the band playing, "A Charge to Keep I Have" to waltz-time, for the chaplain had made it a special request to the band-master, and the execution was over, the shadows had passed away.

CHAPTER LXIII.

AN AVOWAL OF LOVE.

EXECUTION DAY had come and gone, and a feeling of intense relief had come to all in the fort, except the few morbid natures who wished a sensation, no matter who suffered or what occurred.

A stout post had been planted near the graves of the outlaws, giving a history of their crimes and the date of their execution, as a warning to the wicked to be wary of following their example, and bearing the sad legend:

"Names Unknown."

The troop sent off on a scout had returned, reporting the Indians keeping close within the bounds of their own country, and all at the fort was going on smoothly in its daily routine.

The wounded, excepting several who had died, were about well, and there seemed no cause of alarm anywhere along the line.

Colonel Buckner had received congratulations upon the victory of his troops over the Indians, Major Dunn, Lieutenant Gibbs, Dashing Charlie and Red Soldier had been particularly mentioned in "special orders," and the handsome young *aide de camp* had gone up a round of the ladder, adding a bar to his shoulder-strap, "for distinguished services in the field."

Dashing Charlie had received his share of the reward offered for the men of Muello the Mexican's band dead or alive, and had generously shared it with the soldiers who had captured the outlaws, for Lieutenant Gibbs declined his proportion.

Red Soldier also got his share of the reward for the five whom he killed, as well as their horses, equipments and arms, and the colonel put the amount out at interest for him, so that the Pawnee considered himself an Indian millionaire, and blessed the day he "cut" his tribe to ally himself with the pale-faces.

Such was the situation at the fort when one evening, standing in the moonlight, and half hidden by the wild honeysuckle vines climbing up the piazza lattice of Colonel Gabriel Buckner's house, Fred Gibbs told his story of love to Beatrice.

He told her how he had dreamed of her ever since his first visit to the Texas ranch, on "official business," for the colonel, and afterward how he had held her in his heart, where the image of no other could rest.

The dangers they had known together had but drawn her nearer and dearer to him, and he now begged her to tell him if he could win that little heart of hers, which, however, he hoped was large enough to hold a great, strapping young soldier in full uniform.

He mentioned, for she remained silent through all he had to say, that he was not rich, nor was he poor, for he was worth some forty thousand dollars, thanks to the colonel, and that was not a bad sum for a young officer to begin married life on, while his promotion had increased his pay somewhat, and with her as his wife, he did not doubt but that with love and economy they could get along fairly well.

If she did not think so, please break it gently to him, for though he could fight red-skins, suffer wounds, execute outlaws, play a nifty game of poker, and handle a sword, he was a perfect coward where there was a possibility of losing her.

Beatrice listened in silence to his impassioned appeal, interlarded now and then with a comical expression of doubt.

She seemed to wish to hear him talk, to give him all the rope he needed to hang himself with.

When he could say no more, and was hard and fast aground, standing before her like an "awkward squad" awaiting the command of a bulldozing officer, she looked up into his face.

The moonlight revealed distinctly every feature and expression, and bursting into a fit of merry laughter, she said:

"Fred, you goose, don't look so like you were attending your own funeral, for you have known all along, you uniformed fraud, that I love you more than any words of mine can tell you."

The lieutenant was dumb; he could only gaze in wonder, hope and silence, and Beatrice said, in her *chic* way:

"Come, Fred, kiss me and call it quits, for if it would kill you to lose me, as you have said, I would have died an old maid if you had not asked me to marry you, for you are my beau ideal of manhood."

"My Lord!" gasped Fred Gibbs, and the kiss and hug he gave her caused her to cry out:

"Let me go, you great big grizzly bear, for you have broken every bone in my—"

"Body?" gasped Fred.

"No, my corset."

"Now come in and tell papa about—"

"Your corset?"

"No, you goose, ask him if you can have me, for if he says no, of course I won't marry you."

So into the house they went to face the colonel, and they came upon a love scene there they had not expected to behold.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE COLONEL A CAPTIVE.

ON the afternoon of the evening, on which Fred Gibbs had made an avowal of love to Beatrice, she had gone over to the school-house to walk home with Creola Gray.

She was engaged in some fancy needle-work on a pattern which the teacher had drawn for her, and she wished to ask her advice about it.

The two had walked together to headquarters, and Creola had been urged to remain to tea by both Beatrice and the colonel, and she had consented.

Later in the evening Fred Gibbs had dropped in, and all noticed that he was *distracted* from some cause.

The fact was that the *aide* had screwed his courage up to ask Beatrice to become his wife, and there was just enough of the coquette in the young girl's composition not to have allowed him to know whether she cared for him any more than she did for Grayson Gurney, Major Dunn, Captain Elliott, Harry Vane and several other of the young officers at the fort.

It was not very long before he found an excuse, in the peculiarly bright moonlight, as he had noticed it upon his way over from his quarters, to entice her out upon the rustic piazza.

"Why, Cousin Fred, it is cloudy, you stupid," said Beatrice, when they had reached the piazza and discovered fleecy clouds sailing between the earth and skies.

But Fred Gibbs had accomplished his purpose, and at once began his avowal of love, with a result known already.

In the meanwhile Creola Gray had been left in the cozy sitting-room with Colonel Buckner to entertain her.

Since her coming to the fort she had found the colonel ever kind and attentive, and what had begun as pity for her desolate condition, had gradually ripened into love on his part.

He had loved once, as he could never love again, and between that early love and himself was the grave of one who had been his comrade in boyhood, his best friend in riper years until they became rivals, and a duel had cost the one his life.

Now the colonel, having crossed the threshold of forty years, turned his heart to another, and intended to ask her to become his wife.

For some moments after the two younger lovers left the room no word was spoken by either Creola Gray or Colonel Buckner.

At last the soldier spoke, and his voice was low and earnest, as he said:

"Miss Gray, I am glad of this opportunity to speak to you alone, for I feel pretty sure, from what I read in the face of Lieutenant Gibbs, that we will not be immediately broken in upon."

"What I would say to you, in my blunt way, which however is none the less sincere, is that I have felt in you the deepest interest since you came to us alone, robbed by the road-agents, and seeking to find your brother at this fort."

"The fate of your brother, the fact that you were a bread-winner yourself, instead of having to depend upon others for a support, as it should be, and would have been but for your sisterly love and generosity in sacrificing your fortune for your brother, caused me to desire to aid you, and hence I secured the school for you."

"From that time I have watched you closely, with gathering interest, admiration and regard, and have admired your many noble qualities, your devotion to duty and courage under your misfortunes and sorrows."

"I too have known sorrow and suffering, I too have had my afflictions, my cross to bear and my bitter memories of the past, as I suppose you have heard, for I have lived openly and there are ever those who are ready to pour into the ears of those who do not hear, any stories which may be afloat regarding us who have skeletons in our closets."

"So feeling a bond of sympathy with you, so regarding you with admiration, my feelings have grown warmer toward you, more intense, until they have changed to a love that is lasting, and I ask you if you can forget that I am nearly double your years, for you can scarcely be over twenty, and learn to regard me as one who would protect you through life."

"I am twenty-five," said Creola Gray, in a low tone.

"Indeed? I had not thought you so old as that, and it gives me but twenty years your advantage in age, if years are an advantage, for as I journey nearer the end I often doubt it."

"I should have sought you out in your own

home and asked you to give me your love in return for mine, but you will pardon me that I do so beneath my own roof, for here it is that I wish you to rule as mistress, to be at home."

"Have I misunderstood your kindness toward me, Creola, mistaken friendship for love, and thus asked you to give me a regard which you do not feel, a hand that may be pledged to another?"

The woman's face was very white now, and her lips quivered, for the woman in her nature was aroused, and she felt deepest sympathy for the noble man who thus offered his love.

She did not at first speak, and so the colonel resumed:

"Let me tell you, Creola, that I am well off in this world's goods and can place you above want, can give you a home and position worthy of you, for though I have held it as a secret, I have received my notification of promotion to a brigadier-generalcy."

She looked up now, a proud light flashed in her eyes, and holding forth her hand she said softly, yet earnestly:

"Let me be the first to congratulate you, General Buckner, and let me tell you that the hand I now offer in congratulations you can keep, as you have asked to do so, and where I give my hand my heart goes with it."

Hardly had she uttered the last words when the door opened and in came Beatrice and Lieutenant Gibbs.

"Oh! we didn't wish to break in on a love-scene, but, papa, Cousin Fred has come to ask you to let me marry him," cried Beatrice.

"And what do you say, my child?"

"Oh, I am as anxious to have it so as he is, I feel sure."

"Then, when he asks me, I shall give my consent," said the colonel, with a smile, and he added more seriously:

"And I have to ask your consent, Beatrice, to offer you this lady as a mother."

CHAPTER LXV.

A WOMAN'S ADVICE.

WHEN Colonel Buckner said what he did, breaking the news of his engagement to Creola Gray to Beatrice and Lieutenant Gibbs, a pained look flashed over the face of the young girl.

But it was gone in an instant.

She had seen that her adopted father loved the teacher, and she had felt that, whether that love was returned or not, Creola Gray intended to win position and wealth by marrying the Commandant of Fort Blank.

She did not know how scheming, how sinful was the heart of the woman, but she had read her aright from the first as fair and false, and had never liked her.

Unable to prove that she was right, she tolerated her, and hoped for the best, satisfying her own conscience by giving one little warning to her father.

Of course, it had done no good, and as it was now, she made the best of it and crossing over to the woman kissed her affectionately while she said:

"May you be happy, Miss Gray, and make my dear father as happy as he deserves."

It was an uncompromising congratulation, and crossing to her father, she said:

"Papa, what can I say to you, for you know that you have every good wish in my heart for you?"

"I know it, I feel it, my child, and I certainly can congratulate Fred upon the prize he has drawn in you, and if he does not make you a good husband I'll have him drum-head court-martialed and shot."

"A fate I will richly deserve, sir," laughed Fred, while he added earnestly:

"But permit me to offer to you, sir, and Miss Gray, my warmest wishes for your happiness through life, and if you are half as happy as I am now you are both to be envied."

"And may I extend to you, Lieutenant Gibbs, and to Beatrice, my best wishes upon the step you are entering upon?" and having kissed Beatrice affectionately, and shaken hands with the officer, Creola continued:

"And permit me to make a request that concerns me, for though it may appear scoldish and selfish for me to say so, I am expecting some money to be paid over to me, justly my own, but which would not be surrendered to me were it known that I was to be married, so I beg that my engagement with General Buckner be kept for the present a secret."

"Will you sanction this request, general?" and Creola seemed proud of emphasizing the title.

"With pleasure, Creola," was the answer while Fred Gibbs muttered:

"General?"

"Yes, Fred, it shall be no longer a secret that I am to wear a star in my epaulettes."

"Glory be to—the Promoting Powers that Be," cried Fred, just checking a slip of the tongue which would have shocked the chaplain.

Congratulations followed for the general, and

soon after Creola Gray took her leave, Lieutenant Gibbs acting as her escort home.

He had just turned away from her door, for he liked the fair teacher and had not hurried his walk home with her, when she glided away from the steps and walked toward a little arbor in the storekeeper's grounds, which overlooked the valley and the river.

"I am here," said a voice within.

"Yes, I came to meet you, for I received your note left at the school-house this morning."

"I wished to ask you what had been done, for while I see your own love-affair progressing most favorably, I do not appear to have made any headway."

"I must say that my love affair has progressed well, for General Buckner this night offered me his heart and hand."

"General Buckner?" roared the man.

"You are looking ahead some years in your ambition."

"Oh, no, for it will be made known to-morrow that he has been promoted."

"The deuce you say?"

"Yes."

"He is rising rapidly."

"He deserves it."

"Granted; but when am I to become General Buckner's adopted son-in-law?"

"I do not know."

"What?"

"It rests with you."

"Do you intend to play me false?"

"Oh, no; but I told you long ago to ask her to be your wife."

"I did so."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Well?"

"It was not well, for she told—"

"You she was sorry for you, would be a sister to you and all that."

"She did not."

"What did she say?"

"She told me frankly she was sorry I had forced her to speak frankly, and from such frankness the saints protect me."

"What did she say?"

"Why, that she had tried to like me, but that she trusted her own instinct about a man, never allowed her heart to run away with her head, and was so sure that I was a bad man that she could not offer me her friendship though she had tried ever so hard to do so."

"How well she read you."

"Yes; and she has read you just as well."

"I have seen it, and feared her; but it is too late now for her to act."

"But, about my case?"

"Well, all I can see to be done is to bring dishonor in some way upon Lieutenant Gibbs and turn her against him, you being his champion openly and trying to defend him."

"If his disgrace and your championship does not win her, then turn road-agent and kidnap her, forcing her to marry you, and then forcing the secret from her of where her gold is hidden."

"That is my advice to you."

"And, by Heaven, I shall follow it, so begin the plot against Gibbs at once," was the man's savage reply.

And his face showed in the moonlight the joy he felt in being able to work ruin upon the gallant young officer to accomplish his own ends from greed of gold.

After having agreed upon a plan of action, the two wicked plotters separated to begin their work of ruin.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE LOST FORTUNE.

WHEN General Buckner and Beatrice were left alone together, after the departure of Lieutenant Fred Gibbs and Creola Gray, the two sat together in silence, each one lost in their own meditations.

In spite of her happiness, Beatrice was thinking of her adopted father.

She recalled her happy life with her own parents at the Texas ranch, in her early girlhood, the death of her mother, the shadow upon the household which had followed, the death of her father and then her coming to the fort to live with the one who had become most dear to her.

"As dear as my own father," she had said to herself, and then came her regret to see him wed a woman whom she could not but distrust.

She was wondering if her father would be happy with Creola, when he spoke, breaking the silence that had lasted for minutes.

"Come closer, my child, for I wish to speak to you," he said.

She silently obeyed, and seating herself in a low chair she leaned on his knees and placed her hand in his.

"When you came to me, Beatrice, you filled a void in my heart, and I was happy in the belief that I could make your life a joyous one, until some handsome fellow stole you from me, and when I shuffled off this mortal coil I could make you my heir."

"Then Creola crossed my path, and, well you know that I have asked her to be my wife."

"Now I come to what my wishes are."

"First, I shall place in keeping for you fifty thousand dollars in your own right—"

"Father, I am rich you know."

"I wish to place this away for you, for I desire that you shall have it, and it leaves me with a large fortune besides."

"But my own fortune?"

"That is just it, for count your Texas ranch and other property at a value of fifty thousand, and the fifty thousand I lay by for you, with the gold left you by your uncle at a low valuation of two hundred thousand, it will give you about equal with what I will possess, and that is as I want it and must have it."

"But, now, Beatrice, the question comes up as to where this gold is, this lost fortune of your uncle?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have said nothing about it, believing it safe, and because I was not able to send after it."

"But I was amazed yesterday to learn from Fred that he did not know anything about its hiding-place, and he did not believe that you did."

"I do not, father."

"This is remarkable."

"My own father intended to tell me all, and to give me the papers and map he had drawn, but he died more suddenly than he, or any of us suspected."

"He left some papers, and all of them I gave over to Cousin Fred, and I certainly supposed he knew all about this lost fortune in gold, which has cost so many lives and no end of sorrow and trouble."

"This is strange, for what did Fred do with the papers?"

"I never asked him, sir."

"He told me frankly that he did not know, had received nothing bearing on the case, and could no more find the gold than he could a needle in a haystack."

"I thought it worried him even to discuss the matter, as he feared I might think him attentive to you from other motive than that of pure love."

"He shunned the subject also, sir, whenever it came up between us, and so I said no more about it to him."

"In fact, father, it made no difference to me whether I got it or not."

"But have it you must, and I can see but one way to get it, and, as Fred said, that way is about like looking for a needle in a ton of hay."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"My plan is to send Dashing Charlie on the trail of that gold."

"He is a great trailer, sir, but I fear his talent will fail him there, for you know how well Muello the Mexican searched for it?"

"Yes, but I will try."

Going to the door, the general called his orderly and sent him for the chief of scouts.

Dashing Charlie was not long in putting in an appearance, and asking him to be seated, General Buckner said:

"Mr. Emmett, I believe you were the one who secured the services of the men who went with Chaplain Markham to Texas with his gold?"

"Yes, sir."

"You acted as guide yourself for a short distance?"

"Yes, sir, for a couple of days."

"Did you direct them to the trail they should take?"

"I suggested it, sir."

"And they followed your suggestion?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know that trail?"

"Yes, sir, fairly well, for I went that way after Captain Markham, when his brother, Miner Markham, sent me to fetch him to the mines."

"You could go it again?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Could find the scene of the road-agents' attack upon the gold-carriers' camp?"

"I could, sir."

"Could you find where that gold is buried, is the question?"

"I can but try, sir."

"You have no clew?"

"Only that I advised Captain Markham and his guide to go ahead with the pack-mules, leaving his men to guard the rear, find a place where they could bury the gold, leaving no trail, and not let the men know that it had been taken from the saddles, for rocks were to be substituted."

"It was these rocks the band of Muello the Mexican captured, and I know that the place where the gold-bags were secreted was between the place where I gave the advice to hide them, and the camp, a distance of thirty miles, perhaps, sir."

"Will you undertake to find this gold, taking as many of your own men along as you desire, with pack-mules to bring it back, if found?"

"I will, sir."

"When will you start?"

"At your order to do so, sir."

"Then depart to-morrow night, please," was the reply of the colonel.

CHAPTER LXVII.

AN UGLY RUMOR.

DASHING CHARLIE and six men had gone upon the gold trail, with a complete outfit for camping, digging and bringing back the lost fortune if found, for they carried half a dozen pack-mules with them.

They had left the fort at midnight and no one suspected their purpose.

But somehow it leaked out that Lieutenant Fred Gibbs had received from Beatrice Buckner the map and description of how to find the gold, and when asked for it had said that he had lost them.

It was furthermore said that a stormy interview had been held between the general and his aide, in which the young officer had claimed that he had no knowledge of the treasure's hiding-place.

Upon the strength of this Lieutenant Gibbs had asked for a leave of absence and had left the fort, but whither he had gone no one knew.

Then came an anonymous communication to General Buckner reading as follows:

"You have had implicit faith in your *a-de-de-camp*, Fred Gibbs, but he is playing you false."

"Gold has crazed his brain, for he hid the papers intrusted to his keeping by your daughter, on her way from Texas, and claims to have lost them."

"He has not lost them, and his love now is not to go East, but to seek men somewhere who will go with him to secure this gold, for he knows just where to find it."

This letter pained the general greatly; but he would not show it to Beatrice, and the next day was surprised by her coming to him with a letter to which also there was no signature.

Both letters were mailed in the settlement post-office, and the one to Beatrice read:

"You must not trust Lieutenant Gibbs with your heart and hand until he has given you up your gold."

"He knows just where it is, and has secretly gone to get it while on leave, but not for you, but for himself, to pay gambling and other debts incurred of late years and which will disgrace him if not soon settled."

"He also is engaged to a young girl in New York, but her father will not allow her to marry him unless he can match the fortune which he is to give her, and which he has lately claimed he can do in letters written to the lady in question."

"Your handsome lover is a fraud, and his professed love was to lead suspicion away from him about the papers you gave into his keeping, and which he claimed to have lost when he was made a prisoner by Muello, the Mexican."

"Look before you leap, is the advice of one who wishes you well and has only your good at heart."

There was no signature to this letter, and Beatrice placed it in the hands of her uncle with the simple remark:

"Read this, father."

He did so, and handing over his letter said:

"And here is something for you to read, my child, though I did intend to keep it from you."

"And why keep it from me, sir?" she asked when she had read it.

"For fear it would pain you."

"My dear father, this is a stab in the back and causes me no uneasiness whatever."

"Fred did have the papers, and Muello took them from him."

"That is all there is about it, except that there was no map, no instructions, or Muello would have gotten the gold, and we know that he did not."

"Fred has gone West instead of East, to San Francisco, and he went solely on business of his own."

"A coward only writes a letter they fear to sign, father, and I do not care if I receive a dozen daily, so do not worry for either Fred or me, dear papa."

"My brave girl, I will not do so, for you give me hope that there is nothing in this after all."

"Not a shadow of truth, sir," was the plucky answer.

But that evening General Buckner had a long interview with Creola Gray, and placed the two letters before her.

To his surprise, with seemingly deep regret at having to speak, she said that she dreaded that there was truth in the story, for ugly rumors had reached her ears of debts owed by Lieutenant Gibbs, and that he had squandered what he had, and promised to pay up within a short while, after his return from his leave.

"I must ask you, general," she continued, "to speak to Mr. Gurney upon the subject, for I overheard a stormy interview near my school-house the other day between the Gentleman Sport, and one whom, though I did not see, I supposed, from his voice, to be Lieutenant Gibbs."

"I had remained after school for some time to make up my accounts, and the door was locked, so they supposed the cabin wholly unoccupied."

"See Mr. Gurney, General Buckner, and he may give you some information."

Ten minutes after Grayson Gurney was in the general's quarters, and in answer to a request for information said:

"It pains me, General Buckner, to speak

against one to whom I owe my life, but for fear your beautiful daughter may be sacrificed I will say that I have seen Gibbs copying a much worn map and directions, which he said were a fortune for him."

"Does he owe you anything, sir?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much?"

"About twelve thousand dollars, which he said he would pay when he returned from his leave, as he was going to get a fortune of a quarter of a million left him by some relation."

"We had some hot words one day about it, for I met him by appointment at the school-house, as I told him that, having told me he loved an heiress in New York, he should not trifle with the affections of your daughter."

"I have no more to ask, thank you, Mr. Gurney," said the colonel, and the Gentleman Sport departed.

"Now, my child, come in, for, as I requested, you have heard all."

"All, sir," and Beatrice entered from the next room.

"What do you think?"

"That Grayson Gurney is as treacherous as a snake, and he is not alone in this plot to ruin Fred."

"You think it a plot then?"

"I do, sir, and I shall sift it."

But the ugly rumors still went the rounds, until at last many of the young aide's warmest friends began to suspect him of being a very wicked man.

Others asserted that he had deserted, and then came the open rumor that he had gone to get the gold treasure and would run off with it.

In the midst of these ugly rumors, after an absence of a couple of weeks, Dashing Charlie and his men returned to the fort late one night.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE GOLD-HUNTER.

DASHING CHARLIE sought an interview with General Buckner soon after breakfast, and Beatrice was asked to be present.

"Well, Dashing Charlie, I am glad to see you back again," the general said.

"Thank you, sir, and I am particularly glad to get back."

"May I ask if you were successful?"

"More than successful, sir."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir."

"How can that be?"

"I found the gold."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"How?"

"I took the trail of the gold-carriers, sir, from where I had left them."

"I followed it closely, and decided that if Muello could not find where it had been hidden, then they had left no trail, or had not branched off from the path they were in."

"If the latter, then the gold would have been lifted from the backs of mules into the trees."

"You are a great reasoner, Emmett."

"Thank you, sir."

"But, pray go on, for we are both deeply interested."

"If taken up into the trees, then I had to find the trees."

"This I could not do, none being on the trail where the bags of gold could have been concealed."

"I then had to look elsewhere."

"As water leaves no trail I had to look for a stream that they had crossed."

"I found several, but following them up and down saw no place where the gold could have been hidden in the time Captain Markham and his guide had to accomplish it."

"But near where the trail crossed one stream I found a cliff."

"A man could climb up it, stepping from his saddle, while his horse stood girth deep in the water."

"This I did, and I saw that a lariat could be lowered and the bags drawn up."

"Upon this cliff, after some search, I found the gold."

"Bravo, Emmett."

"It is all in my quarters, sir, numbered as it was when I saw it last; and more, the bags contain gold, not rocks."

"You are a wonderful man, Emmett."

"Thank you, general, but I have made another discovery."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir; I found a man ill on the trail, and cared for him several days until he was able to travel."

"I once did him a great service, and as he is dying with consumption, and feels that he cannot live, he has made a confession which interests you, sir, Lieutenant Gibbs and others in the fort."

"The man, sir, is the brother of Muello, the Mexican, and he has long been on the search for him. He is not a Mexican, nor is his brother. He belonged to the band of outlaws, and was

supposed to have been killed; but he recovered from his wound and returning to seek the band found them wiped out."

"He came to the fort and the first man he met was Dick Darling, and he sought out the chief who is here in disguise, or rather as his natural self, and told him of his brother's coming."

"That brother met him and paid him a large sum to at once go away."

"He did so, but was taken with a hemorrhage on the trail and I found him very ill."

"Then he told me the whole story, and is in hiding in my quarters now, until to-night when I can bring him to see you."

"And you say that Muello, the Mexican, is here in this fort?" cried the amazed general, while Beatrice was pale with excitement.

"Yes, sir, and he has carried on a most devilish plot, aided by two allies, one of whom is a woman, the other a man."

"The woman! Quick, the name of the woman!" cried Beatrice.

"She is one whom you have befriended in every way—a snake in the grass, known here as Creola Gray."

"My God, have mercy!" groaned the general, covering his face with his hands.

"And the man, Muello, the Mexican, is the man known as Grayson Gurney?" cried Beatrice.

"He is, miss."

"And the third schemer is Dick Darling, his guide?"

"Yes, miss."

"Father, I read them aright. I have dreaded that they were wicked, but thought them not so bad as this."

The general made no reply, and Dashing Charlie said:

"It is even worse, for the man, Gurney, and the woman, Gray, are man and wife!" was the startling announcement of the scout.

"Great God! can you prove this, Charles Emmett?" cried the general, his face white.

"I can, sir, through the man I brought with me to the fort," was the reply of the scout.

"Emmett, something tells me that all you have said is true."

"Go with your men, arrest Grayson Gurney and Dick Darling, and also that woman."

"Let there be no mistake, and bring them here to my quarters."

"Then bring the man you speak of here, and I will know all the truth."

"If true, that man, Gurney, shall die at sunset to-day along with his guide, and that woman—"

"Father, make no threat against her."

"She is a woman, so let her go her way with her own conscience as a fitting punishment for her crimes, if conscience she has."

"It shall be as you wish, my child," was the softened response of the stricken soldier.

CONCLUSION.

It was as Beatrice wished, for the scout arrested the prisoners; they were brought before General Buckner and his daughter, while Lieutenant Gibbs returning just then was invited in to hear all that was said.

The man brought by Dashing Charlie to the fort, came in with the scout, and confronting those he accused, told his long and painful story, ending with the words:

"I have told the truth as Heaven is my judge, and as witnesses who know my brother and his wife here can be brought to the fort to prove."

"I hope my confession may atone for my crimes of the past, for it will spare the victims of these two."

"I have but a short while to live, so speak as a dying man."

"There is no need of witnesses, for I confess all, and dare not ask for mercy."

"That man is Muello the Mexican, for he robbed me of my jewelry which he has, exchanged rings with me, and here is the one he gave me as a safeguard against his men."

"In his cabin you will find my jewelry, and much else that he has stolen from passengers."

"Need I say more?"

"No, madam, nothing more; but, bid that man, your husband, farewell, for you leave the fort within the hour, and he dies at sunset in company with his guide. Lieutenant Gibbs, see that my orders are carried out."

And they were to the letter.

Weeks after there was a wedding at the fort, and Beatrice became the wife of Captain Fred Gibbs, her only sorrow at such a time being the thought that her father suffered deeply for the love he had lost, the woman who had played him false.

And the one who commanded the escort of the young couple to the station to start upon their wedding tour was Dashing Charlie, while, along with him, went his scouts, and Red Soldier the Pawnee, who said over and over again:

"Charlie heap great man on trail of red-skin and bad pale-face."

THE END.

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- 489 The Diamond Sport; or, The Double Face of Bed Rock.
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- 730 Violet Vane's Verdict.
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- 750 Violet Vane, the Vanquished.
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422 Kit Bandy's Right Bower; or, Baby Sam, the Boy Giant.
444 Kit Bandy's Swoop; or, Little Buckskin, the Centaur.
473 Kit Bandy's Sleek Scheme; or, Old Tom Rattler.
661 Kit Bandy's Deliverance; or, Banner Ben.
680 Kit Bandy's Pard; or, Daintless Dan, the Freelance.
791 Kit Bandy Rattled; or, The Infant Giant.
795 Kit Bandy in Red Ruin; or, The Young Whirlwind.
799 Kit Bandy's Big Rustle; or, Saddle King Sam.
804 Kit Bandy's Brigade; or, Dan, the Mountain Guide.
927 Kit Bandy's Brigade in Arizona.
939 Kit Bandy's Star Engagement.

- 153 Jack Drew, the Nemesis; or, Eagle Kit the Boy Demon.
182 Jack Drew's Drop; or, Little Hurricane, the Boy Captain.
202 Jack Drew in Deadwood; or, Prospect Pete.

- 27 Keen Knife on Guard; or, Antelope Abe, the Boy Guide.
81 Keen Knife, the Prince of the Prairies.

- 5 Vagabond Joe, the Young Wandering Jew.
18 The Dumb Spy.
41 Lasso Jack, the Young Mustang.
58 The Border King; or, The Secret Fox.
71 Delaware Dick, the Young Ranger Spy.
74 Hawk-eye Harry, the Young Trapper Ranger.
88 Rollo, the Boy Ranger; or, The Heiress.
184 Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Rifleman.
148 Scar-Face Saul, the Silent Hunter.
178 Old Solitary, the Hermit Trapper.
218 Tiger Tom, the Texas Terror.
224 Dashing Dick; or, Trapper Tom's Castle.
228 Little Wildfire, the Young Prairie Nomad.
238 The Parson Detective; or, The Little Ranger.
248 The Disguised Guide; or, Wild Raven, the Ranger.
260 Dare-Devil Dan, the Young Prairie Ranger.
272 Minkskin Mike, the Boy Sharpshooter.
290 Little Foxfire, the Boy Spy; or, Old Caleb Arbuckle.
300 The Sky Demon; or, Rainbolt, the Ranger.
384 Whip-King Joe, the Boy Ranchero.
409 Hercules; or, Dick, the Boy Ranger.
417 Webfoot Mose, the Tramp Detective.
457 Wingedfoot Fred; or, Old Polar Saul.
468 Tamarac Tom, the Big Trapper Boy.
482 Stonewall Bob, the Boy Trojan.
562 Blundering Basil, the Hermit Boy Trapper.
652 Don Barr, the Plains Freelance.
670 Norway Nels, the Big Boy Mountaineer.
778 Highland Harry, the Wizard Rifleman.
828 Poker Jack, the Detective Sport.

BY T. J. FLANAGAN.

- 909 Midshipman Dare, the Pirate Catcher.
925 The Young Cowboy Captain.
933 The Two Midshipmen; or, The Corsair-Chaser's First Cruise.

BY DAN DUNNING.

- 746 Quiet Jack, the Secret Service Spy.
767 Mac and Jack, the Invincibles; or, The Diabolical Three.
875 Detective Dave's Close Call.
884 Farrel Fox and His Girl Ferret.
898 Farrel Fox's Sweep-Stakes.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS.

- 485 Git Thar Owny, the Unknown.
492 Git Thar Owny's Pledge.
513 The Demon Doctor; or, Deadhead, the Kid Detective.
581 Double-Curve Dan, the Pitcher Detective.
598 Plute, the Singer Detective; or, Owny in a New Role.
608 The Pitcher Detective's Foll; or, Dan's Double Play.
616 The Ocean Detective; or, The Last Cruise of the Black Bear.
681 The Pitcher Detective's Toughest Tussle.
736 Larry the Thoroughbred; or, Beaten on Every Side.
779 Iron Hand, the Charmed Detective.
854 Uncle Sam's Detective in Chicago.

BY WM. G. PATTEN.

- 629 Violet Vane, the Velvet Sport; or, The Jubilee of Jacktown.
663 Violet Vane's Victory; or, The Jasper City Clean Out.
693 Violet and Daisy, the Pony Parads.
705 Violet Vane's Vow; or, The Crafty Detective's Craft.
724 Violet Vane's Vengeance; or, The Wipe-Out.
730 Violet Vane's Verdict; or, The Game at Coffin City.
741 Violet Vane, the Ventriloquist Vdogg; or, Sport vs. Sport.
750 Violet Vane, the Vanquished; or, The Life Struggle.
763 Violet Vane's Vision; or, The Fiery Hand of Fate.
489 The Diamond Sport; or, The Double Face of Red Rock.
519 Captain Mystery; or, Five in One.
581 Daisy Dare, the Sport from Denver.
587 Old Bombshell, the Ranger Detective.
604 Iron Fern, the Man of Fire; or, Among the Vultures.
619 The Boy Tramp Detective; or, The Double Grip Witness.
641 Dismal Dave's Dandy Pard; or, The Clue to Capt. Claw.
651 Bound Boy Frank, the Young Amateur Detective.
682 Wild Vulcan, the Lone-Range Rider.
714 Old Misery, the Man from Missouri.
774 Clear-Grit Cal, the Never-Say-Die Detective.
789 Sam Sheridan, the Secret Service Special.
806 Cowboy Steve, the Ranch Mascot.
820 Nobby Nat, the Tenderfoot Detective.
836 Sharper Stoke's Double Deal.
857 Spotter Bob in New York.
866 Spotter Bob's Bowery Racket.

BY COLONEL DELLE SARA.

- 108 The Lion of the Sea; or, The Valled Lady.
186 Cool Desmond; or, The Gambler's Big Game.

BY CAPTAIN FRED. WHITTAKER.

- 15 The Sea-Cat; or, The Witch of Darien.
29 The Dumb Page; or, The Doge's Daughter.
43 Dick Darling, the Pony Express Rider.
150 Lance and Lasso; or, The Children of the Chaco.
154 The Sword Hunters; or, The Land of the Elephant Riders.
159 The Lost Captain; or, Skipper Jabez Coffin's Cruise.
200 The Boy Bedouins; or, The Brothers of the Plumed Lance.
214 Wolfgang, the Robber of the Rhine.
249 Milo Homer, the Animal King; or, Round the World.
265 The Tiger Tamer; or, The League of the Jungle.
331 Black Nick, the Demon Rider.
395 California Joe's War Trail.

BY CAPT. J. F. C. ADAMS.

- 734 Oregon Sol; or, Nick Whiffles' Boy Spy.
746 Glass-Eye, the Great Shot of the West.
54 Ned Hazel, the Boy Trapper.
56 Nick Whiffles' Pet; or, In the Valley of Death.
60 The White Indian; or, The Scout of the Yellowstone.
70 Old Zip's Cabin; or, The Greenhorn in the Woods.
81 Lightning Jo, the Terror of the Prairie.
85 Buck Buckram; or, Boss, the Female Trapper.
247 Old Grizzly and His Pets; or, The Wild Huntress.
251 Light-house Light; or, Osceola, the Firebrand.
257 The Lost Hunters; or, The Underground Camp.
288 The Scalp King; or, The Human Thunderbolt.

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- 28 Nick or the Night; or, The Boy Spy of '76.
37 The Hidden Lodge; or, The Little Hunter.
47 Nightingale Nat; or, The Forest Captains.
64 Dandy Jack; or, The Outlaws of the Oregon Trail.
82 Kit Harefoot, the Wood-Hawk; or, Old Powder-face.
94 Midnight Jack; or, The Boy Trapper.
106 Old Frosty, the Guide; or, The White Queen.
128 Kiowa Charley, the White Mustang.
139 Judge Lynch Jr.; or, The Boy Vigilante.
155 Gold Trigger, the Sport; or, The Girl Avenger.
169 Tornado Tom; or, Injun Jack From Red Core.
188 Ned Temple, the Border Boy; or, The Mad Hunter.
198 Arkansas; or, The Queen of Fate's Revenge.
207 Navajo Nick, the Boy Gold Hunter.
215 Captain Bullet; or, Little Tonknot's Crusade.
231 Plucky Phil; or, Ross, the Red Jezebel.
241 Bill Bravo; or, The Roughs of the Rockies.
255 Captain Apollo, the King-Pin of Bowle.
267 The Buckskin Detective; or, The King of Road-agents.
279 Old Winch; or, The Buckskin Desperadoes.
294 Dynamite Dan; or, The Bowie Blade of Gochetopa.
302 The Mountain Detective; or, The Trigger Bar Bully.
316 Old Eclipse, Tramp Card of Arizona.
326 The Ten Pards; or, The Terror of Take-Notice.
336 Big Benson; or, The Queen of the Lasso.
345 Pitiless Matt; or, Red Thunderbolt's Secret.
356 Cool Sam and Pard; or, The Terrible Six.
366 Velvet Foot, the Indian Detective.
386 Captain Outlass; or, The B-caneer's Girl Foe.
396 Rough Rob; or, The Twin Champions of Blue Blazes.
411 The Silken Lasso; or, The Rose c Ranch Robin.
418 Felix Fox, the Boy Spotter; or, The Gold Gang of New York.
425 Texas Tramp, the Border Rattler.
436 Phil Flash, the New York Fox; or, The Mystery of Room 21.
445 The City Vampires; or, Red Rolfe's Pigeon.
461 One Against Fifty; or, The Last Man of Keno Bar.
470 The Boy Shadow; or, Felix Fox's Hunt.
477 The Excelsior Sport; or, The Washington Spotter.
499 Single Sight, the One-Eyed Sport.
502 Branded Ben, the Night Ferret.
512 Dodger Dick, the Wharf-Spy Detective.
521 Dodger Dick's Best Dodge; or, The Gotham Gold Gang.
528 Fox and Falcon, the Bowery Shadows.
538 Dodger Dick, the Dock Ferret.
543 Dodger Dick's Double; or, The Rival Boy Detectives.
553 Dodger Dick's Desperate Case.
563 Dodger Dick, the Boy Vdogg; or, The Gang of Three.
573 The Two Shadows; or, Dodger Dick's Stop Game.
582 Dodger Dick's Drop; or, The Man from Jersey.
594 Little Lon, the Street-Singer Detective.
610 Old Skinner, the Gold Shark; or, Tony Sharp on Guard.
626 The Champion Pards; or, The Lucifer of Silver Bar.
637 Dick Doan, the Dock Boy Detective.
645 Kit, the Pavement Sharp.
653 Billy Bantam, the Boy Beagle.
671 Jersey Jed, the Boy Hustler; or, Shadowing the Shadower.
685 Happy Hugh, the Boy Musician Detective.
701 Photograph Fred, the Camera Sharp.
715 Wide Awake Len, the Quaker City Ferret.
732 Daisy Bell, the Pavement Detective; or, Trapping Big Game.
742 Billy Winks, the Bell Boy Detective.
754 Billy Winks, the Boss Boy Shadow.
768 Eagle Ned, the Boy on Guard; or, The Camp Spiders.
780 Tonkaway Tom, the Red Wizard.
827 The Bantam Sport.
848 Clip, the Battery Ferret; or, Jack's Foul Play.
897 Davy Doon's Big Bounce.
905 Dandy Nugget, the Boy Shadow.
921 The Boy from Denver.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

- 118 Will Somers, the Boy Detective.
122 Phil Hardy, the Boss Boy.
126 Picayune Pete; or, Nicodemus, the Dog Detective.
130 Detective Dick; or, The Hero in Rags.
142 Handsome Harry, the Bootblack Detective.
147 Will Wildfire, the Thoroughbred.
152 Black Boss, Will Wildfire's Kacer.
157 Mike Merry, the Harbor Police Boy.
162 Will Wildfire in the Woods.
165 Billy Baggage, the Railroad Boy.
170 A Tramp Card; or, Will Wildfire Wins and Loses.
174 Bob Rockett; or, Mysteries of New York.
179 Bob Rockett, the Bank Runner.
183 The Hidden Hand; or, Will Wildfire's Revenge.
187 Fred Halyard, the Life Boat Boy; or, The Smugglers.
189 Bob Rockett; or, Driven to the Wall.
196 Shadowed; or, Bob Rockett's Fight for Life.
206 Dark Paul, the Tiger King.
212 Dashing Dave, the Dandy Detective.
220 Tom Tanner; or, The Black Sheep of the Flock.
225 Sam Charcoal, the Premium Dandy.
235 Shadow Sam, the Messenger Boy.
242 The Two "Bloods"; or, Shenandoah Bill and His Gang.
252 Dick Dashaway; or, A Dakota Boy in Chicago.
262 The Young Sharps; or, Rollicking Mike's Hot Trail.
274 Jolly Jim, the Detective Apprentice.
289 Jolly Jim's Job; or, The Young Detective.
298 The Water-Hound; or, The Young Thoroughbred.
305 Dashaway, of Dakota; or, A Western Lad in Quaker City.
324 Ralph Ready, the Hotel Boy Detective.
341 Tony Thorne, the Vagabond Detective.
353 The Reporter-Detective; or, Fred Flyer's Blizzard.
367 Wide-Awake Joe; or, A Boy of the Times.
379 Larry, the Leveler; or, The Bloods of the Boulevard.
403 Firefly Jack, the River-Rat Detective.
423 The Lost Finger; or, The Entrapped Cashier.
428 Fred Flyer, the Reporter Detective.
432 Invincible Logan, the Pinkerton Ferret.
456 Billy Brick, the Jolly Vagabond.
466 Wide-Awake Jerry, Detective; or, Entombed Alive.
479 Detective Dodge; or, The Mystery of Frank Hearty.
488 Wild Dick Racket; or, How He Fought for Honor.
501 Boots, the Boy Fireman; or, Too Sharp for the Sharper.
566 The Secret Service Boy Detective.
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655 Plucky Paul, the Boy Speculator.
667 Bob and Sam, the Daisy Detectives.
709 The Curbstone Detective; or, Harry Hale's Big Beat.
757 Detective Frank's Sweep-stakes.
869 Ned Norman, the Game Broker.
881 Turkey Billy, the Shine-em-up Detective.
917 Flash Lightning, the Mountain Mascot.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

- 11 The Two Detectives; or, The Fortunes of a Bowery Girl.
76 Abe Colt, the Crow-Killer.
79 Sol Gluger, the Giant Trapper.
233 Joe Buck of Angels and His Boy Pard.
447 New York Nat. A Tale of Tricks and Traps in Gotham.
458 New England Nick; or, The Fortunes of a Foundling.
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493 Toss Ted, the Arizona Sport.
510 Cool Colorado, the Half-Breed Detective.
518 Cool Colorado in New York; or, The Cowboy's Fight.

BY CAPT. ALFRED B. TAYLOR U. S. A.

- 191 Buffalo Billy, the Boy Bullwhacker.
194 Buffalo Bill's Bet; or, The Gambler Guide.

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- 469 The Rival Giants of Nowhar.
498 Cactus Burr, the Man from Hard Luck.
537 Old Buckeye, the Sierra Shadow.
564 Powder Phil, the Boy Miner, or, The Man Without a Past.
609 Bolly Borrit, the Veteran Detective.
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136 Night-Hawk Kit; or, The Daughter of the Ranch.
144 Dainty Lance, the Boy Sport.
151 Panther Paul; or, Dainty Lance to the Rescue.
160 The Black Giant; or, Dainty Lance in Jeopardy.
168 Deadly Dash; or, Fighting Fire with Fire.
184 The Boy Trappers; or, Dainty Lance on the War-Path.
203 The Boy Pards; or, Dainty Lance Unmasks.
211 Crooked Cale, the Caliban of Celestial City.
319 The Barranca Wolf; or, The Beautiful Decoy.
319 The Black Rider; or, The Horse-Thieves' League.
335 Old Double Fist; or, The Strange Guide.
355 The King of the Woods; or, Daniel Boone's Last Trail.
449 Kit Fox, the Border Boy Detective.
625 Chincapin Dan, the Boy Trapper.
677 Chincapin Dan's Second Trail.
688 Chincapin Dan's Home Stretch.
698 Old Crazy, the Man Without a Head.
708 Light-Heart Lute's Legacy.
718 Light-Heart Lute's Last Trail.
723 Silverblade, the Shoshone.
729 Silverblade, the Half-Blood; or, The Border Beagle at Bay.
739 Silverblade, the Hostile; or, The Border Beagle's Trail.
748 Silverblade, the Friendly; or, The Border Beagle's Boy Pard.

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- 155 Captain Paul; or, The Boy Spy of the Mountains.
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BY JACK FARRAGUT.

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137 The Helpless Hand; or, Backwoods Retribution.
239 The Gold-seeker Guidet; or, The Lost Mountain.

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91 The Captain of the Club; or, The Rival Athletes.
101 Jack Hawkaway in New York.

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585 Will Waters, the Boy Ferret. By H. Enton.
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831 The Chicago Drummer's Deal. By J. G. Bethune.
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- 42 Deadwood Dick's Bonanza; or, The Phantom Miner.
- 49 Deadwood Dick in Danger; or, Omaha Oil.
- 57 Deadwood Dick's Eagles; or, The Parole of Flood Bar.
- 73 Deadwood Dick on Deck; or, Calamity Jane, the Heroine.
- 77 Deadwood Dick's Last Act; or, Corduroy Charlie.
- 100 Deadwood Dick in Leadville.
- 104 Deadwood Dick's Device; or, The Double Cross Sign.
- 109 Deadwood Dick as Detective.
- 129 Deadwood Dick's Double; or, The Gorgon's Gulch Ghost.
- 138 Deadwood Dick's Home Base; or, Blonds Bill.
- 149 Deadwood Dick's Big Strike; or, A Game of Gold.
- 156 Deadwood Dick of Deadwood; or, The Picked Party.
- 195 Deadwood Dick's Dream; or, The Rivals of the Road.
- 201 Deadwood Dick's Ward; or, The Black Hills Jezebel.
- 205 Deadwood Dick's Doom; or, Calamity Jane's Adventure.
- 217 Deadwood Dick's Dead Deal.
- 221 Deadwood Dick's Death-Plant.
- 232 Gold-Dust Dick, A Romance of Roughs and Toughs.
- 263 Deadwood Dick's Divide; or, The Spirit of Swamp Lake.
- 268 Deadwood Dick's Death Trail.
- 309 Deadwood Dick's Deal; or, The Gold Brick of Oregon.
- 321 Deadwood Dick's Dozen; or, The Fakir of Phantom Flats.
- 347 Deadwood Dick's Duets; or, Days in the Diggings.
- 351 Deadwood Dick Sentenced; or, The Terrible Vendetta.
- 362 Deadwood Dick's Claim.
- 405 Deadwood Dick in Dead City.
- 410 Deadwood Dick's Diamonds.
- 421 Deadwood Dick in New York; or, A "Cute Case."
- 430 Deadwood Dick's Dust; or, The Chained Hand.
- 443 Deadwood Dick, Jr.; or, The Crimson Crescent Sign.
- 448 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Defiance.
- 453 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Full Hand.
- 459 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Big Round-Up.
- 465 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Racket at Claim 10.
- 471 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Corral; or, Roseman Bill.
- 476 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Dog Detective.
- 481 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Deadwood.
- 491 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Compact.
- 496 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Inheritance.
- 500 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Diggings.
- 508 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Bellverance.
- 515 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Protegee.
- 522 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Three.
- 529 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Danger Ducks.
- 534 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Death Hunt.
- 539 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Texas.
- 544 Deadwood Dick, Jr. the Wild West Video.
- 549 Deadwood Dick, Jr. on His Mettle.
- 554 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Gotham.
- 561 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Boston.
- 567 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Philadelphia.
- 572 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Chicago.
- 578 Deadwood Dick, Jr. Aloft.
- 584 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Denver.
- 590 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Decree.
- 595 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Reelzebub's Basin.
- 600 Deadwood Dick, Jr. at Coney Island.
- 606 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Leadville Lay.
- 612 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Detroit.
- 618 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Cincinnati.
- 624 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Nevada.
- 630 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in No Man's Land.
- 636 Deadwood Dick, Jr. After the Queer.
- 642 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Buffalo.
- 648 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Chase Across the Continent.
- 654 Deadwood Dick, Jr. Among the Smugglers.
- 660 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Insurance Case.
- 666 Deadwood Dick, Jr. Back in the Mines.
- 672 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Durango; or, "Gathered In."
- 678 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Discovery; or, Found a Fortune.
- 684 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Dazzle.
- 690 Deadwood Dick, Jr. at Danger Divide.
- 695 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Drop.
- 700 Deadwood Dick, Jr. at Jack-Pot.
- 704 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in San Francisco.
- 710 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Still Hunt.
- 716 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Dominoes.
- 722 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Disguise.
- 728 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Double Deal.
- 734 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Deathwatch.
- 740 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Doublet.
- 746 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Deathblow.
- 752 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Desperate Strife.
- 758 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Lone Hand.
- 764 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Defeat.
- 770 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Resurrection.
- 776 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Dark Days.
- 782 Deadwood Dick, Jr. Defied.
- 788 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Double Device.
- 794 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Desperate Venture.
- 800 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Diamond Dice.
- 806 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Royal Flush.
- 812 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Head-off.
- 818 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Rival.
- 824 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Boom.
- 830 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Scoop.
- 836 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Proxy.
- 842 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Clutch.
- 848 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s High Horse.
- 854 Deadwood Dick, Jr. at Devil's Gulch.
- 858 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Death-Hole Hustle.
- 863 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Bombshell.
- 870 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Mexico.
- 876 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Decoy Duck.
- 882 Deadwood Dick, Jr. in Silver Pocket.
- 891 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Dead-Sure Game.
- 898 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Double Drive.
- 904 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Trade-Mark.
- 910 Deadwood Dick, Jr. at Tip-Top.
- 916 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Double-Decker.
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- 934 Deadwood Dick, Jr. at Flush Flats.
- 940 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Shake-up.
- 946 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Double Drop.
- 951 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Right Bower.
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- 965 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Gold-Strike.
- 971 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Oath.
- 977 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Death-Doom.
- 986 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Best Card.
- 992 Deadwood Dick, Jr. at Gold Dust.

BY WILLIAM R. EYSTER.

- 190 Dandy Darke; or, The Tigers of High Pine.
- 210 Faro Frank; or, Dandy Darke's Go-Down Pards.
- 818 The Hustler Rogue-Catcher.
- 828 Poker Pete's Double Dodge.
- 851 The Tie-To Sport; or, High Hustling at Sinners' Flat.
- 855 Monte Saul, the Sport.
- 901 Diamond Dave, the Gilt-Edge Shooter.
- 919 Crack-Shot Dandy's Drop.
- 931 The Sport in Velvet; or, Big Burk's Bluff.
- 945 Billy Bird's Bonanza; or, The Rook-Ravens' Root-Out.
- 962 Flip-Flap Fred at Hard Pan.
- 969 The Girl Sport-Shadower; or, Clark's Close Shave.
- 988 Banty Billy's Bonanza; or, The Bear-Tamer's Disguise.

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- 80 Rosebud Rob; or, Nugget Ned, the Knight.
- 84 Rosebud Rob on Hand; or, Idyl, the Girl Miner.
- 88 Rosebud Rob's Reappearance; or, Photograph Phil.
- 121 Rosebud Rob's Challenge; or, Cinnamon Chip.
- 277 Denver Doll, the Detective Queen; or, The Yankee's Surround.
- 281 Denver Doll's Victory; or, Skull and Crossbones.
- 285 Denver Doll's Decey; or, Little Bill's Bonanza.
- 296 Denver Doll's Drift; or, The Road Queen.
- 368 Yreka Jim, the Gold-Gatherer; or, The Life Lottery.
- 372 Yreka Jim's Prize; or, The Wolves of Wake-Up.
- 385 Yreka Jim's Joker; or, The Rivals of Red Nose.
- 394 Yreka Jim of Yuba Dam.
- 209 Fritz, the Bound-Boy Detective; or, Dot Leafle Game.
- 213 Fritz to the Front; or, The Ventriloquist Hunter.
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- 248 Sierra Sam's Secret; or, The Bloody Footprints.
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- 258 Sierra Sam's Seven; or, The Stolen Bride.
- 334 Kangaroo Kit; or, The Mysterious Miner.
- 339 Kangaroo Kit's Racket; or, The Pride of Played-Out.
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- 96 Watch-Eye, the Detective; or, Arabs and Angels.
- 117 Gilt-Edged Dick, the Sport Detective.
- 145 Captain Ferret, the New York Detective.
- 161 New York Nell, the Boy-Girl Detective.
- 226 The Arab Detective; or, Snoozer, the Boy Sharp.
- 291 Turk the Boy Ferret.
- 325 Kelley, Hickey & Co., the Detectives of Philadelphia.
- 343 Manhattan Mike, the Bowery Detective.
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- 434 Jim Beak and Pal, Private Detectives.
- 26 Clemen Hoof, the Buffalo Demon; or, The Border Vultures.
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- 45 Old Avalanche; or, Wild Edna, the Girl Brigand.
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- 98 Canada Chet; or, Old Anasconda in Sitting Bull's Camp.
- 113 Jack Hoyle, the Young Speculator.
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- 141 Solid Sam, the Boy Road-Agent; or, The Branded Brow.
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- 240 Cyclone Kit, the Young Gladiator; or, The Locked Valley.
- 278 Jumbo Joe, the Boy Patrol; or, The Rival Heirs.
- 330 Little Quik-Shot; or, The Dead Face of Daggarville.
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- 382 Cool Kit, the King of Kids; or, A Villain's Vengeance.
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- 579 Broadway Billy's Surprise Party.
- 605 Broadway Billy; or, The Boy Detective's Big Inning.
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- 708 Broadway Billy's Brand.
- 711 Broadway Billy at Santa Fe; or, The Clever Deal.
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- 735 Broadway Billy's Business.
- 738 Broadway Billy's Curious Case.
- 753 Broadway Billy in Denver.
- 762 Broadway Billy's Bargain; or, The Three Detective.
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- 786 Broadway Billy's Team; or, The Combine's Big Pull.
- 790 Broadway Billy's Brigade; or, The Dead Alive.
- 796 Broadway Billy's Queer Bequest.
- 800 Broadway Billy's Signal.
- 805 Broadway Billy's Signal Scoop.
- 810 Broadway Billy's Wipe Out.
- 815 Broadway Billy's Bank Racket.
- 821 Broadway Billy's Bluff.
- 826 Broadway Billy Among Jersey Thugs.
- 833 Broadway Billy's Raid.
- 839 Broadway Billy's Big Boom.
- 844 Broadway Billy's Big Bulge.
- 849 Broadway Billy's \$100,000 Snap.
- 856 Broadway Billy's Blind; or, The Bootblack Stowaway.
- 862 Broadway Billy in London.
- 868 Broadway Billy's London Slums.
- 874 Broadway Billy's French Game.
- 880 Broadway Billy and the Bomb-Throwers.

- 989 Bicycle Bob's Hot Scorch.
- 990 Silver-Mask, the Man of Mystery; or, The Golden Keys.
- 991 Shasta, the Gold King; or, For Seven Years Dead.
- 420 The Detective's Apprentice; or, A Boy Without a Name.
- 424 Cibola John; or, Red-Hot Times at Ante Bar.
- 439 Sandy Sam, the Street Scout.
- 467 Disco Dan, the Dandy Dude.
- 506 Redlight Ralph, the Prince of the Road.
- 524 The Engineer Detective; or, Redlight Ralph's Resolve.
- 548 Mart, the Night Express Detective.
- 571 Air-Line Luke, the Young Engineer; or, The Double Case.
- 592 The Boy Pinkerton; or, Running the Rascals Out.
- 615 Fighting Harry, the Chief of Chained Cyclones.
- 640 Bareback Beth, the Centaur of the Circle.
- 647 Typewriter Tilly, the Merchant's Ward.
- 659 Moonlight Morgan, the "Plenest" Man of Ante Bar.
- 887 Battery Bob, the Dock Detective.
- 894 Arizona Dick's Wipe-Out.
- 900 Jumping Jack's Jubilee.
- 906 Safety Sam, the Cycle Sport.
- 912 Train Boy Trist's Hot Hustle.
- 918 The Trump Dook-Boy.
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- 930 Rustler Ralph, the Boy Spotter.
- 935 The Ex-Newboy Detective's Chum.
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- 944 Cowboy Charlie's Double.
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- 960 The Broadway Sport; or, Elver Fred's Clear Case.
- 967 \$1000 Reward; or, The Rival Reporters' Sleek Scoop.
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- 988 Buffalo Bill's Lasso Throwers.
- 981 Buffalo Bill's Fighting Five.
- 975 Buffalo Bill's Rifle Shots.
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- 964 Buffalo Bill's Decey; or, The Arizona Crack Shot.
- 958 Buffalo Bill's Mazeppa-Chase.
- 948 Buffalo Bill's Snap-Shot; or, Wild Kid's Texan Tally.
- 942 Buffalo Bill's Tough Tussle.
- 936 Buffalo Bill's Boy Mascot; or, Joe Jarvis' Hold-up.
- 929 Buffalo Bill's Crack-shot Pard.
- 650 Buffalo Bill's Boy Pard; or, Butterfly Billy.
- 216 Bison Bill, the Prince of the Reins.
- 222 Bison Bill's Cluet; or, Grit, the Bravo Sport.

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- 55 Deadly-Eye, the Unknown Scout; or, The Banded Brotherhood.
- 68 Border Robin Hood; or, The Prairie Rover.
- 158 Fancy Frank of Colorado; or, The Trapper's Trust.

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- 191 Buffalo Billy, the Boy Bullwhacker.
- 194 Buffalo Bill's Bet; or, The Gambler Guide.

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- 909 Midshipman Dare, the Pirate Catcher.
- 925 The Young Cowboy Captain.
- 933 The Two Midshipmen; or, The Corsair-Chaser's First Cruise.
- 949 The Three Lieutenants.
- 959 The Mascot Middy; or, The Four Commanders.
- 966 Fighting Jack Shubrick.
- 972 Fighting Jack's Middles; or, Dandy Dick's Dash.

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- 926 New York Nat and the Traitor Ferret.
- 920 New York Nat Trapped.
- 914 New York Nat's Three of a Kind.
- 908 New York Nat's Double.
- 902 New York Nat's in Colorado.
- 896 New York Nat in Gold Nugget Camp.
- 889 New York Nat's Deadly Deal.
- 883 New York Nat's Crook-Chase.
- 877 New York Nat's Trump Card.
- 871 New York Nat and the Grave Ghouls.
- 865 New York Nat's Masked Mascot.
- 859 New York Nat, the Gamble Detective.
- 853 Dick Doom's Kidnapper Knock-Out.
- 847 Dick Doom's Ten Strike.
- 842 Dick Doom's Flush Hand.
- 772 Dick Doom's Death-Grip; or, The Detective by Destiny.
- 777 Dick Doom's Destiny; or, The River Blackleg's Terror.
- 784 Dick Doom; or, The Sharps and Sharks of New York.
- 788 Dick Doom in Boston; or, A Man of Many Masks.
- 793 Dick Doom in Chicago.
- 798 Dick Doom in the Wild West.
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- 808 Dick Doom's Death Clue.
- 818 Dick Doom's Diamond Deal.
- 819 Dick Doom's Girl Mascot.
- 829 Dick Doom's Shadow Hunt.
- 835 Dick Doom's Big Haul.
- 749 Dashing Charlie; or, The Kentucky Tenderfoot's First Trail.
- 756 Dashing Charlie's Destiny; or, The Renegade's Captive.
- 760 Dashing Charlie's Pawnee Pard.
- 766 Dashing Charlie, the Rescuer.
- 497 Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys.
- 737 Buck Taylor, the Comanche's Captive.
- 743 Buck Taylor's Boys; or, The Red Riders of the Rio Grande.
- 560 Pawnee Bill, the Prairie Shadower.
- 713 Pawnee Bill; or, Carl, the Mad Cowboy.
- 719 Pawnee Bill's Pledge; or, The Cowboy's Doom.
- 725 Pawnee Bill; or, Daring Dick.
- 692 Redfern's Curious Case; or, The Rival Sharps.
- 691 Redfern at Devil's Ranch; or, The Sharp from Texas.
- 702 Redfern's High Hand; or, Blue Jacket.
- 707 Redfern's Last Trail; or, The Red Sombrero Rangers.
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- 589 Tom-Cat and Pard; or, The Dead Set at Silver City.
- 622 Tom-Cat's Trial; or, The Affair at Tombstone.
- 631 Tom Cat's Terrible Task; or, The Cowboy Detective.
- 638 Tom-Cat's Triumph; or, Black Dan's Great Combine.
- 546 Captain Cactus, the Chaparral Cock; or, Josh's Ten Strike.
- 568 The Dandy of Dodge; or, Rustling for Millions.
- 576 The Silver Sport; or, Josh Peppermint's Jubilee.
- 583 Saffron Sol, the Man With a Shadow.
- 601 Happy Hans, the Dutch Video; or, Hot Times at Round-Up.
- 611 Bludd Barnacle, the Detective Hercules.
- 646 Cowboy Gid, the Cattle-Range Detective.
- 657 Warbling William, the Mountain Mountebank.
- 665 Jolly Jeremiah, the Plains Detective.
- 676 Signal Sam, the Lookout Scout.
- 689 Billy, the Gypsy Spy; or, The Mystery of Two Lives.
- 699 Simple Sim, the Broncho Buster; or, For Big Stakes.
- 712 The Mesmerist Sport; or, The Mystified Detective.
- 733 Toltec Tom, the Mad Prospector.
- 745 Kansas Jim, the Cross-Cut Detective.
- 761 Marmaduke, the Mustang Detective.
- 773 The Rustler of Rolling Stone.
- 785 Lone Hand Joe, the Committee of One.
- 801 Kent Kirby, the High-Kicker from Killbuck.
- 832 The Doctor Detective in Texas.
- 872 Two Showmen Detectives in Colorado.
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- 961 The Tramp's Trump-Trick.

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884 Toe Spotter-Sport's Neck-Tie Party.
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862 Riata Rob, the Range Champion.
855 The C-who Chief's Sure-Shot.
848 The Rival Red-Hat Sports.
837 Curly Kid, the Cheyenne Sport.
824 The Soft Hand Detective.
815 The Soft Hand's Clutch.
809 Dan Dunn, the Soft-Hand Sport.
796 The Frisco Detective's Thug-Tangle.
789 Sam Cary, the River Sport.
780 The Dead Sport's Double.
771 Prince John, Detective Special.
763 Dandy Don, the Denver Detective.
754 The Man from Texas; or, Dangerfield, the Doctor Detective.
744 Sweepstakes Sam, the Silver Sport.
720 The Secret Six; or, Old Halcyon.
712 The Man of Silk.
705 Bantam Bob, the Beauty from Butte.
698 Kent Kasson, the Preacher Sport.
683 Bob Breeze, the Rounder Detective.
675 Steel Surry, the Sport from Sunrise.
668 Solemn Saul's Luck Streak.
661 The Get-There Sharp.
651 Silvertip Steve, the Sky Scraper from Siskiyou.
645 Gopher Gabe, the Unseen Detective.
636 Dandy Darling, Detective.
627 Mossback Mose, the Mountaineer.
617 The Grip Sack Sharp's Even up.
597 Big Bandy, the Brigadier of Brimstone Butte.
588 Sandy Sands, the Sharp from Snap City.
576 Silver-Tongued Sid; or, Grip Sack Sharp's Sweep.
564 The Grip-Sack Sharp; or, The Seraphs of Sodom.
555 Grip-Sack Sid, the Sample Sport.
547 The Buried Detective; or, Saul's Six Sensations.
541 Major Magnet, the Man of Nerve.
535 Dandy Dutch, the Decorator from Dead-Lift.
527 Dandy Andy, the Diamond Detective.
514 Gabe Gunn, the Grizzly from Ginseng.
504 Solemn Saul, the Sad Man from San Saba.
495 Rattlepate Rob; or, The Roundhead's Reprisal.
488 The Thoroughbred Sport.
474 Daddy Dead-Eye, the Despot of Dew Drop.
466 Old Rough and Ready, the Sage of Sundown.
458 Dutch Dan, the Pilgrim from Spitzenberg.
443 A Cool Hand; or, Pistol Johnny's Picnic.
438 Oklahoma Nick.
433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.
426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Secret Service Spy.
416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.
409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Fan Handle.
403 The Nameless Sport.
395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout.
286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand.
283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
257 Death Trap Diggings; or, A Man 'Way Back.
249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.
233 The Old Boy of Tombstone.
201 Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt.
180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona.
170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.
165 Joaquin, the Terrible.
154 Joaquin, the Saddle King.
141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.
119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters.
105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
88 Big George; or, The Five Outlaw Brothers.
71 Captain Cool Blade; or, Mississippi Man Shark.
67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.

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- 610 Fire-Eye, the Thug's Terror.
795 Old Night-Hawk, the Crook Shadower.
768 The Prince of New York Crooks.
756 Old Burke, the Madison Square Detective.
747 Double-Voice Dan's Double Disguise.
715 Double-Voice Dan on Deck.
702 Double-Voice Dan, the Always-on-Deck Detective.
696 Double-Voice Dan, the Go-it Alone Detective.
689 The Sparkler Sharp.
676 Hurricane Hal, the Cowboy Hotspur.
669 Old True Blue, the Trusty.
663 The Giant Sport; or, Sold to Satan.
656 Old Plug Ugly, the Rough and Ready.
648 Gold Glove Gid, the Man of Grit.
641 Aztec Jack, the Desert Nomad.
631 Colonel Cool, the Santa Fe Sharp.
602 Captain Nameless, the Mountain Mystery.
571 Old Dismal, the Range Detective.
545 Hustler Harry, the Cowboy Sport.

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- 910 The Arizona Detective.
894 Silver Sam, the Shasta Sport.
880 The Silver Sport's Double.
868 The Race-Course Detective.
856 The Hayseed Detective.
772 Captain Corden, the Twister Detective.
755 Wild Pete the Broncho-Buster Detective.
726 Fearless Sam, the Grand Combination Detective.
719 Boston Bob, the Sport Detective.
572 Jaunty Joe, the Jockey Detective.
554 Mad Sharp, the Rustler.
538 Rube Rocket, the Tent Detective.
526 Death-Grip, the Tenderfoot Detective.
507 The Drummer Detective.
432 The Giant Horseman.
398 Sleepless Eye, the Pacific Detective.

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- 916 Two Dead-Square Sports.
902 Soft Velvet, the Man from Sandrock.
891 Genteel Jim, Sport-at-Large.
881 The Clubman-Crook's Cat's-paw.
867 The Frisco Sport.
852 The Stranger Sport's Shake-up.
828 Kirk King, the Man from Kirby.
818 Gentleman Dave, the Dead Game Sport.
783 The King-Pin Tramp.
767 The Sport of Silver Bend.
718 Uncle Bedrock's Big Bounce.
707 The Rival Rovers.
687 Double Cinch Dan, the Sport With a Charm.
677 Mr. Jackson, the Gent from Jaybird.
659 Gilt-Edge Johnny; or, Roldan and His Rovers.
650 Lucky Lester's Lone Hand.
634 Old Handcart's Big Dump.
622 The All Around Sports.
608 Desert Alf, the Man With the Cougar.
590 Gentle Jack, the High Roller from Humbug.
578 Seven Shot Steve, the Sport with a Smile.
568 The Dude Detective.
558 Hurrah Harry, the High Horse from Halcyon.
549 Belshazzar Brick, the Bailiff of Blue Blazes.
533 Oregon, the Sport With a Scar.
503 The Dude from Denver.
478 Pinnacle Pete; or, The Fool from Way Back.
459 Major Sunshine, the Man of Three Lives.
429 Hair Trigger Tom of Red Bend.
402 Snapshot Sam; or, The Angels' Flat Racket.
396 The Piper Detective; or, The Gilt Edge Gang.
375 Royal George, the Three in One.
356 The Handsome Sports; or, The Combination.
333 Derringer Dick, the Man with the Drop.
268 Magic Mike, the Man of Frills.
229 Captain Cuttle-eye; or, The Little Sport.
214 The Two Cool Sports; or, Gertie of the Gulch.
182 Hands Up; or, The Knights of the Canyon.
160 Soft Hand, Sharp; or, The Man with the Sand.
145 Pistol Pards; or, The Silent Sport from Cinnabar.

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- 657 Long Tom, the Privateer.
633 The Sea Spy.
621 The Red Privateer; or, The Midshipman Rover.
584 Fire Feather, the Buccaneer King.
517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail.
361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.
122 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.
111 The Smuggler Captain; or, The Skipper's Crime.
18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Queen of the Isle.
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827 Detective Walden's Web.
778 The Butler Detective; or, Old Grip's Grip.
770 The Showman Detective.
762 Old Grip, the Detective.
740 Captain Clew, the Fighting Detective.
732 The Hurricane Detective.
643 Castlemaine, the Silent Sifter.
616 Magnus, the Weird Detective.
606 The Drop Detective.
595 Wellborn, the Upper Crust Detective.
582 Joram, the Detective Expert.
574 Old Falcon's Double.
561 The Thug King; or, The Falcon Detective's Foe.
548 Falconbridge, the Sphinx Detective.
536 Old Falcon's Foe; or, The Detective's Swell Job.
515 Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond Field Detective.
509 Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective.
501 Springsteel Steve, the Retired Detective.
494 The Detective's Spy.
485 Rowlock, the Harbor Detective.
477 Dead-arm Brandt.
467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
462 The Circus Detective.
451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
444 The Magic Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

- 752 The Suspect Sport of Daisy Drift.
626 Ducats Dion, the Nabob Sport Detective.
612 Sheriff Stillwood, the Regulator of Raspberry.
598 The Dominic Detective.
591 Duke Daniels, the Society Detective.
580 Shadowing a Shadow.
565 Prince Paul, the Postman Detective.
557 The Mountain Graybeards; or, Riddles' Riddle.
519 Old Riddles, the Rocky Ranger.
499 Twilight Charlie, the Road Sport.
473 Gilbert of Gotham, the Steel-arm Detective.
452 Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.
436 Kentucky Jean, the Sport from Yellow Pine.
422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.
390 The Giant Cupid; or, Cibus John's Jubilee.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 483 Flush Fred, the River Sharp.
368 The Canyon King; or, A Price on his Head.
348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

- 267 The White Squaw.
234 The Hunter's Feast.
213 The Wild Huntress; or, The Squatter.
200 The Rifle Rangers; or, Adventures in Mexico.
74 The Captain of the Rifles; or, The Lake Queen.
66 The Specter Barque. A Tale of the Pacific.
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854 Toe Ocean Gipsy.
834 The Wild Steer Riders; or, Texas Jack's Terrors.
819 The Rival Monte Cristos.
805 The Last of the Pirates; or, Doem Driven.
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791 The Coast-Raider's Death-Chase.
748 Arizona Charlie, the Crack-shot Detective.
704 Invisible Ivan, the Wizard Detective.
685 The Red-skin Sea Rover.
679 Revello, the Pirate Cruiser; or, The Rival Rovers.
672 The Red Rapiet; or, The Sea Rover's Bride.
662 The Jew Detective; or, The Beautiful Convict.
640 The Rover's Retribution.
635 The Ex Buccaneer; or, The Stigma of Sin.
625 Red Wings; or, The Gold Seekers of the Bahamas.
615 The Three Buccaneers.
610 The Red Flag Rover; or, White Wings of the Deep.
605 The Shadow Silver Ship.
600 The Silver Ship; or, The Sea Scouts of '76.
593 The Sea Rebel; or, Red Rovers of the Revolution.
587 Conrad, the Sailor Spy; or, True Hearts of '76.
581 The Outlawed Skipper; or, The Gantlet Runner.
560 The Man from Mexico.
553 Ma. Monte, the Mutineer; or, The Branded Brig.
546 The Doomed Whaler; or, The Life Wreck.
530 The Savages of the Sea.
524 The Sea Chaser; or, The Pirate Noble.
510 El Moro, the Corsair Commodore.
493 The Scouts of the Sea.
457 The Sea Insurgent; or, The Conspirator Son.
446 Ocean Ogre, the Outcast Corsair.
435 The One-Armed Buccaneer.
430 The Fatal Frigate; or, Rivals in Love and War.
399 The New Monte Cristo.
393 The Convict Captian.
377 Afloat and Ashore; or, The Corsair Conspirator.
369 The Coast Corsair; or, The Siren of the Sea.
364 The Sea Fugitive; or, The Queen of the Coast.
341 The Sea Desperado.
336 The Magic Ship; or, Sandy Hook Freebooters.
325 The Gentleman Pirate; or, The Casco Hermits.
318 The Indian Buccaneer; or, The Red Rovers.
307 The Phantom Pirate; or, The Water Wolves.
255 The Pirate Priest; or, The Gambler's Daughter.
246 Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.
235 Red Lightning the Man of Chance.
224 Black Beard, the Buccaneer.
220 The Specter Yacht; or, A Brother's Crime.
210 Buccaneer Bess, the Lioness of the Sea.
205 The Gambler Pirate; or, Lady of the Lagoon.
198 The Skeleton Schooner; or, The Skimmer.
184 The Scarlet Schooner; or, The Sea Nemesis.
104 Montezuma, the Merciless.
103 Merle, the Mutineer; or, The Red Anchor Brand.

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- 802 Dan Dirk, King of No Man's Land.
583 Captain Adair, the Cattle King.
567 Captain Midnight, the Man of Craft.
544 The Back to Back Pards.
522 The Champion Three.
502 Bareback Buck, the Centaur of the Plains.
472 Six Foot Si; or, The Man to "Tie To."
431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.
404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
299 Three of a Kind; or, Dick, Despard and the Sport.
251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
114 The Gentleman from Pike.
80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.
29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON.

- 323 Hotspur Hugh; or, The Banded Brothers.
311 Heavy Hand; or, The Marked Men.
305 Silver-Plated Sol, the Montana Rover.
291 Horseshoe Hank, the Man of Big Luck.
285 Lightning Bolt, the Canyon Terror.
276 Texas Chick, the Southwest Detective.
271 Stonefist, of Big Nugget Bend.
266 Leopard Luke, the King of Horse-Thieves.
263 Iron-Armed Abe, the Hunchback Destroyer.
258 Bullet Head, the Colorado Bravo.
237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
227 Buckshot Ben, the Man-Hunter of Idaho.
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176 Lady Jaguar, the Robber Queen.

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909 Buffalo Bill's League; or, Red Butterfly.
904 Buffalo Bill's Tangled Trail.
900 Buffalo Bill's Rough Riders.
895 Buffalo Bill's Secret Ally.
890 Buffalo Bill's Life-Stroke.
882 The Three Bills: Buffalo Bill Wild Bill and Band-box Bill; or, The Bravo in Broadcloth.
874 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Braves.
869 Buffalo Bill's Road-Agent Round-up.
863 Buffalo Bill's Death Charm.
857 Buffalo Bill's Royal Flush.
851 Buffalo Bill's Double Dilemma.
845 Buffalo Bill's Redskin Ruse.
830 Buffalo Bill's Boys in Blue.
826 Buffalo Bill's Sharp Shooters.
822 Buffalo Bill's Best Bower.
816 Buffalo Bill's Red Trail.
812 Buffalo Bill's Death-Knell.
794 Buffalo Bill's Winning Hand.
787 Buffalo Bill's Dead Shot.
781 Buffalo Bill's Brand.
777 Buffalo Bill's Spy Shadower.
769 Buffalo Bill's Sweepstake.
765 Buffalo Bill's Dozen; or, Silk Ribbon Sam.
761 Buffalo Bill's Mascot.
757 Buffalo Bill's Double.
750 Buffalo Bill's Big Four; or, Custer's Shadow.
743 Buffalo Bill's Flush Hand.
739 Buffalo Bill's Blind; or, The Masked Driver.
735 Buffalo Bill and His Merry Men.
731 Buffalo Bill's Beagles; or, Silk Lasso Sam.
727 Buffalo Bill's Body Guard.
722 Buffalo Bill on the War-path.
716 Buffalo Bill's Scout Shadowers.
710 Buffalo Bill Baffled; or, The Deserter Desperado.
697 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Brotherhood.
691 Buffalo Bill's Blind Trail; or, Mustang Madge.
667 Buffalo Bill's Swoop; or, The King of the Mines.
658 The Cowboy Clan; or, The Tigress of Texas.
653 Lasso King's League; or, Buck Taylor in Texas.
649 Buffalo Bill's Chief of Cowboys; or, Buck Taylor.
644 Buffalo Bill's Bonanza; or, Silver Circle Knights.
632 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
329 Buffalo Bill's Pledge; or, The League of Three.
189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.

By Buffalo Bill.

- 839 The Ranch King Dead-Shot.
820 White Beaver's Still Hunt.
807 Wild Bill, the Wild West Duelist.
800 Wild Bill, the Dead-Center Shot.
639 Buffalo Bill's Gold King.
599 The Dead Shot Nine; or, My Pard's of the Plains.
414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.
401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
153 Death-Trail, the Chief of Scouts.

By Leon Lewis, Ned Buntline, etc.

- 773 Buffalo Bill's Ban; or, Cody to the Rescue.
692 Buffalo Bill's Secret Service Trail.
629 Buffalo Bill's Daring Role; or, Daredeath Dick.
517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail; or, The Express Rider.
153 Buffalo Bill, Chief of Scouts.
117 Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Dashing Dandy.
92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS.

- 914 Snowflake Sam's Double.
897 The Six-Shot Spotter.
887 The Stranger Sport from Spokane.
873 The Sport Detective's Colorado Clew.
860 The Spangled Sport Shadower.
843 The Crescent City Sport.
832 Gid Gale's Block Game.
804 The King Pin of the Leadville Lions.
786 Chicago Charlie's Diamond Haul.
776 Chicago Charlie, the Columbian Detective.
758 The Wizard King Detective.
723 Teamster Tom, the Boomer Detective.
709 Lodestone Lem, the Champion of Chestnut Burr.
695 Singer Sam, the Pilgrim Detective.
688 River Rustlers; or, the Detective from 'Way Back.
673 Stuttering Sam, the Whitest Sport of Santa Fe.
666 Old Adamant, the Man of Rock.
618 Kansas Karl, the Detective King.
552 Prince Primrose, the Flower of the Flock.
528 Huckleberry, the Foot-Hills Detective.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

- 883 The Man from Mexico in New York.
872 The King-Pin Shark; or, Thad Burr's Ten Strike.
861 The Tenderloin Big Four.
853 The Quaker City Crook.
844 Tracked to Chicago.
836 The Policy Broker's Blind.
829 The Frisco Sharper's Cool Hand.
821 The Tramp Shadower's Backer.
813 The Sham Spotter's Shrewd Scheme.
806 The Grand Street Gold-Dust Sharper.
798 Detective Burr's Luna's Witness.
792 The Wall Street Sharper's Snap.
784 Thad Burr's Death Drop.
742 Detective Burr Among the New York Thugs.
731 Detective Burr's Foil; or, A Woman's Strategy.
723 Detective Burr, the Headquarters Special.
713 Detective Burr's Spirit Chase.
706 Detective Burr's Seven Clues.
698 Thad Burr, the Invincible; or, The "L" Clue.
690 The Matchless Detective.
680 XX, the Fatal Clew; or, Burr's Master Case.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES.

- 929 Gentleman George, the Showman Sport.
912 Genteel Joe's Lone Hand.
903 The Train Detective.
896 Kent Keen, the Crook-Crusher.
888 Nightshade in New York.
879 Falcon Flynn, the Flash Detective.
871 The Crook Cashier.
859 Clew-Hawk Keene's Right Bower.
847 Hiram Hawk, the Harlem Detective.
840 Major Bullion, Boss of the Tigers.
831 Shadowing the London Detective.
817 Plush Velvet, the Prince of Spotters.
803 The Bogus Broker's Right Bower.
788 The Night-Hawk Detective.
779 Silk Ribbon's Crush-out.
766 Detective Zach, the Broadway Spotter.
751 The Dark Lantern Detective.
736 The Never-Fail Detective.
724 Captain Hercules, the Strong Arm Detective.
711 Dan Damon, the Gilt-Edge Detective.
701 Silver Steve, the Branded Sport.
694 Gideon Grip, the Secret Shadower.
684 Velvet Van, the Mystery Shadower.
678 The Dude Desperado.
671 Jason Clew, the Silk-Handed Ferret.
664 Monk Morel, the Man-Hunter.
654 Sol Sphinx, the Ferret Detective.
642 Red Pard and Yellow.
608 Silent Sam, the Shadow Sphinx.
592 Captain Sid, the Shasta Ferret.
579 Old Cormorant, the Bowery Shadow.
569 Captain Cobra, the Hooded Mystery.
559 Danton, the Shadow Sharp.
550 Silk Hand, the Mohave Ferret.
543 The Magnate Detective.
532 Jack Javert, the Independent Detective.
523 Reynard of Red Jack; or, The Lost Detective.
512 Captain Velvet's Big Stake.
505 Phil Fox, the Genteel Spotter.
496 Richard Redfire, the Two Worlds' Detective.
487 Sunshine Sam, a Chip of the Old Block.
480 Hawkspare, the Man with a Secret.
478 Coldgrip in Deadwood.
460 Captain Coldgrip, the Detective.
453 Captain Coldgrip's Long Trail.
447 Volcano, the Frisco Spy.
441 The California Sharp.
434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.
421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow.
413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.
407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick.
400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.
392 The Lost Bonanza; or, The Boot of Silent Hound.
382 The Bonanza Band; or, Dread Don of Cool Clan.
374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.
365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow.
352 The Desperate Dozen.
347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand."
340 Cool Conrad, the Dakota Detective.
335 Flash Dan, the Nabob; or, Blades of Bowie Bar.
321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit.
294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.

BY LEON LEWIS.

- 797 Pistol Tommy, the Miner Sharp.
785 The Down East Detective in Nevada.
773 Buffalo Bill's Ban; or, Cody to the Rescue.
699 The Cowboy Couriers.
686 The On-the-Wing Detectives.
624 The Submarine Detective; or, The Water Ghouls.
484 Captain Ready, the Red Ransomer.
481 The Silent Detective; or, The Bogus Nephew.
456 The Demon Steer.
428 The Flying Glim; or, The Island Lure.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 931 Frisco Frank at Glory Gulch.
920 The Montana Miner in New York.
908 The Doodson-Den Detective.
899 The Double-Quick Detective.
893 Yellow Gid of Dark Divide.
885 The Expert Detective's Shake-up.
875 Trapping the Race Track Judge.
864 The Police Special's Dilemma.
849 The Genteel Sharper's Combine.
841 Graydon's Double Deal.
833 The Sport Detective's Grip.
823 The Athlete Sport About Town.
808 The Crook-Detective's Pull.
790 Plunger Pete, the Race Track Detective.
782 Royal Rock, the Round-up Detective.
774 Steve Starr, the Dock Detective.
764 The New York Sharp's Shadower.
738 Detective Claxton, the Record Breaker.
714 Gabe Gall, the Gambolier from Great Hump.
703 Spokane Saul, the Samaritan Suspect.
692 Dead-Shot Paul, the Deep-Range Explorer.
655 Strawberry Sam, the Man with the Birthmark.
646 Dark John, the Grim Guard.
638 Murdock, the Dread Detective.
623 Dangerous Dave, the Never-Beaten Detective.
611 Alkali Abe, the Game Chicken from Texas.
596 Rustler Rube; the Round-Up Detective.
585 Dan Dixon's Double.
575 Steady Hand, the Napoleon of Detectives.
563 Wyoming Zeke, the Hotspur of Honey-suckle.
551 Garry Kean, the Man with Backbone.
539 Old Doubledark, the Wily Detective.
531 Saddle-Chief Kit, the Prairie Centaur.
521 Paradise Sam, the Nor'-West Pilot.
513 Texas Tartar, the Man With Nine Lives.
506 Uncle Honest, the Peacemaker of Hornets' Nest.
498 Central Pacific Paul, the Mail Train Spy.
492 Border Bullet, the Prairie Sharpshooter.
486 Kansas Kitten, the Northwest Detective.
479 Gladiator Gabe, the Samson of Sassajack.
470 The Duke of Dakota.
463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
437 Deep Duke; or, The Man of Two Lives.
427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
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775 King Dandy, the Silver Sport.
753 Gideon's Grip at Babylon Bar.
717 Captain Pat McGowen, the Greencoat Detective.
674 Uncle Sun Up, the Born Detective.
670 The Lightweight Detective.
665 The Frisco Detective; or, The Golden Gate Find.
613 Keen Billy, the Sport.
607 Old Benzine, the "Hard Case" Detective.
594 Fire Face, the Silver King's Foe.
585 The Silver Sharp Detective.
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570 The Actress Detective; or, The Invisible Hand.
562 Lone Hand, the Shadow.
520 The Lone Hand on the Caddo.
490 The Lone Hand in Texas.
475 Chin Chin, the Chinese Detective.
465 The Actor Detective.
440 The High Horse of the Pacific.
423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
363 Crowningshield, the Detective.
320 The Genteel Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
101 The Man from New York.
91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.
75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison and Street.
72 The Phantom Hand; or, The 5th Avenue Heiress.
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31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning.
27 The Spotter Detective; or, Girls of New York.

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905 Shasta Sam, the Sparkler.
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759 The Sport from St. Louis.
518 Royal Richard, the Thoroughbred.

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